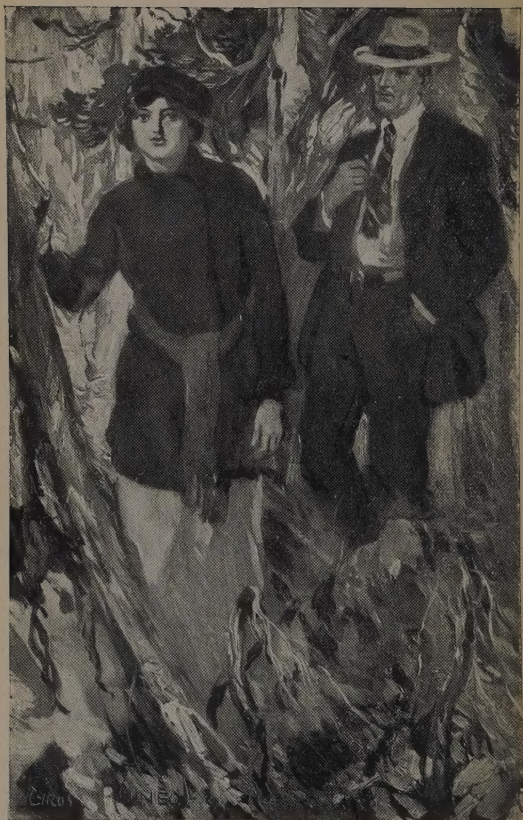


THE SUPREME
DESIRE
GERTRUDE
PAGE





"He leaned back against a tree and looked at her."
(Chapter XVII.)

The Supreme Desire]

[*Frontispiece*

THE SUPREME DESIRE

BY

GERTRUDE PAGE

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THE SUPREME DESIRE.

CHAPTER I.

NORMAN LUTTERWORTH.

WHEN Norman Lutterworth left England behind him, to go and track moose in the wilds of Canada, he left many other things behind as well. Notable among them was any tendency he might have to a sociable frame of mind. One had to talk to people in England and open doors, and pick up dropped handkerchiefs, and pay empty compliments. Why be bothered with that phase of life, when a golden opportunity presented itself to leave it all behind? Not that Norman was over-burdened with a sociable frame of mind at any time; he was far more inclined to exhibit a callous or lazy indifference; but if one were a squire of many acres, with a beautiful old manor house of one's own, it was almost indispensable to be amenable to the conventionalities at intervals. But, unknown, and *en route* to shoot moose in Canada, however, was quite another matter, and our sportsman commenced his voyage to Montreal with every intention of grabbing the warmest and the sunniest spot on deck, and maintaining a calm indifference to the existence of everybody else on the passenger list. In consequence, when Ireland was left well behind, and even the Atlantic rollers had achieved their worst for the majority of voyagers, out into the sun strolled Norman Lutterworth, Esquire, knowing full well that a generous tip had already reserved for him that particular sunny spot aft, sheltered from the chilly Atlantic breezes; and that his luxurious

chair and rugs and general paraphernalia were more or less arranged with the express purpose of keeping off any individual disposed to share his pleasant spot. Finding everything to his liking, he signified his approval to the deck steward who hovered attentively near, and then leaned on the rail to enjoy the freshness a little, before ensconcing himself in the unsociable solitude he intended to maintain until they reached port.

Standing thus, with his elbows on the rail, there was little in his general appearance to attract the notice of those more amiable passengers, who, agreeably surprised to find they could walk along the deck without any need to keep one eye on the ship's edge (so to speak), or on the familiar little enamel receptacle of yesterday, began to blossom out into a friendly attitude that enveloped all the world—or that concentrated essence of it collected in the narrow precincts of a Canadian Pacific steamer. They said "good morning" to each other affably, and discussed the sea and the weather, and asked the captain the names of ships of which they could only see the smoke on the horizon. The captain, a dry old Scotchman, replied grimly that he had not yet learnt to tell the name of a ship from the colour of its smoke, and with an uncertain laugh the passenger either moved on or remained undaunted, to inflict further torment. Certainly few troubled to scrutinise the lean, spare figure, in a big ulster, and a cap low over his eyes, who, in another little concentrated world wielded despotic sway over a village community, a retinue of servants, and an adoring mother.

The circumstances fitted in admirably with Norman Lutterworth's mood.

Once, every year, it was his hobby to break loose from the trammels of conventional life. He would either shoot rhino in East Africa, or big buck in Rhodesia, or bears in the Rockies, or moose in the backwoods. Then, leaner than ever, he would return with his trophies and slide back into the desultory, aimless life of a country squire, varied with excursions into a somewhat more lurid atmosphere in town, of

which he told his mother very little. She, dear lady, fondly believed that in London he met many charming girls, among whom he would presently select a wife; and on his return would hover a little sentimentally in her conversation upon the quiet joys of matrimony, particularly when it included a well-populated nursery.

Norman neither negatived the idea, nor acquiesced in it. With a vivid picture in his mind of gay little supper tables, and sinuous limbs in tight skirts swaying in the latest fashionable dance, and unnaturally white faces, with unnaturally bright eyes and unnaturally red lips, smiling into his without any preliminaries of introduction, his lowered lids hid an expression in his eyes that suggested he could at least see the humours of a situation behind his more or less habitual attitude of *laissez-faire*.

The charming girls, such as his mother pictured, always bored him to extinction, but there was no reason why he should tell her so, if the mental picture of that well-filled nursery gave her pleasure, and her fond hopes went no further than little sentimental suggestions, which left him free to follow his own sweet will.

Of course, it was desirable that there should be another Norman Lutterworth presently to wield despotic sway over that old-world village and retinue of servants, but there was no particular hurry, and the generally-accepted tacit understanding that he should marry his cousin, Hester Strange, by and by, had relegated the question to a comfortable background. Yet, as he leaned on the rail and gazed into the misty silences of the north, there was a little shadow of apprehension in his eyes. For ere he left London, he had been adroitly inveigled into an interview with Hester's mother, and the comfortably vague state of affairs had been focussed very distinctly upon a declared engagement and a fixed wedding day. It appeared Hester was just at the right age to marry—and a little inclined to flirt unwisely—and, altogether, it would be better for her to be settled.

How much of this was diplomatic suggestion on the

part of Hester's mother, who was of a distinctly worldly turn of mind, did not particularly interest Norman. If he must marry, no doubt he might as well marry Hester as anyone else, but he objected to the haste. He liked his freedom extremely, with his yearly travels and his jaunts to town to entertain ladies far lovelier and more amusing than his mother's wildest imagination ever pictured; but likewise far removed from any possibility of fulfilling her gentle dreams; and he saw no need to think of a wedding-day yet. But his aunt proved exceedingly tenacious, and in the end he gave a lukewarm promise to consider himself engaged to Hester, and to contemplate fixing a date on his return. That he should do anything so commonplace as to fall in love, had become so remote a contingency to Norman that he scarcely gave it a thought. And that he was incorrect in his diagnosis, and in consequence the subject of a novel in this year of grace, is perhaps a little more commonplace still; but since there is "nothing new under the sun," I can only commend my world-old romance to the indulgence of a kindly jury.

But, at least, leaning over the rail that sunny morning in the Atlantic, Norman believed he would continue to think all women boring and irritating—except at occasional gay suppers, when they did not count in a serious plan of life. For the rest, he was glad Hester was pretty and possessed an air of distinction that made a man like to be seen with her, and appeared to be a reasonably docile creature likely to be quite happy with that desirable nursery, and not of a nature to interfere with any of his plans and pursuits.

So perhaps it was not entirely apprehension that shadowed his eyes as he gazed into the "misty silences" of the north. Maybe it was the slow stirring of a spirit none suspected, kept carefully under lock and key, except when England and all those other things were left behind, and before him lay the pathless woods and boundless prairies and wide lakes that were miniature seas amid the great spaces of Canada. Some primitive, and at the same time, imaginative, instinct, that conventional surroundings successfully held in

leash, seemed to rouse itself slowly and strengthen its grip, as the white, churned pathway behind grew longer and longer; and back into the grey eyes crept that remote, dreamy expression of the man who lives amid wide horizons, and gazes to a far-off sky-line with an empty world between.

Only the thin lips were still a little hard, and the lines of the face a little rigid, revealing the writtings of many years of self-pleasing, and the hardening process of a soul that chose to be a law unto itself, and had developed a half-cynical, half-indifferent, slightly superior air towards the rest of the universe.

But now the wide spaces lay ahead, and the eyes turning dreamily to the west saw enticing visions of solitary camps and wonderful star-lit heavens, and eager, breathless tracking of the wary moose. And the chained spirit that loved these things better than the fleshpots of England awakened more fully and stretched its cramped limbs in the revivifying atmosphere.

Then, suddenly, it was as though it received a rebuff. A sense of the proximity of some unacceptable personality recalled the conventional soul to its lordship, and Norman turned round, to find that a forbidding looking figure, in a black garb that grievously offended his fastidious taste, had positively dared to bring a little folding deck-chair and place it so that it enjoyed a corner of *his* shelter, and *his* sunshine. Certainly, she had had the kindness to turn her back to him, but the mere fact of anyone sitting near at all was an irritation, and under his breath he vented his feelings in terms that were more expressive than polite.

Then, because she seemed to him only to grow more inartistic on inspection, he sank into his own luxurious chair and opened a newspaper wide to hide her from view. "She is like a black crow sitting on a tombstone," he commented savagely, as if he would as soon shoot that offending crow as his first moose, and fixed the concealing paper with greater rigidity.

But if he had any vague hope of instilling into the "black crow" by some mental telegraphy the fact

that her presence was excessively irritating to his august person, he might have saved himself both the trouble and his newspaper protection ; for Kitt Fitzgerald, mourning bitterly the green shores of her beloved Ireland, and many other dear treasures left in the tender keeping of the Emerald Isle, was scarcely aware of his existence. Something sat in the luxurious deck-chair- with a costly rug across its knees, but whether it was an old man or an old woman or a young despot with cold grey eyes was a matter of utter indifference to her.

So, in a sense, she had a subtle revenge for his mental description of herself.

CHAPTER II.

MORE ABOUT "KITT."

WHEN the lengthening, churned, white pathway on the ocean carries you away from a new-made grave, held close to the heart of the beloved homeland ; and from a fond mental picture of a stalwart young Irishman, who, so to speak, has been there always, you do not greatly mind whether or not your appearance is likely to prove pleasing to a strange person trying to monopolise the most sheltered spot on deck. As well look like a crow on a tombstone as anything else ! What matter, since the most adorable father in the world is dead ; and Pat, whom we have played with and teased and pestered generally from infancy, is left behind to revel still in the earthly paradise of dear Donegal ? What matter even if the sun shines or does not shine ? If the great grey rollers lift the ship like a plaything to the skies, and then sink her down in the hollows just for their own amusement in a boisterous, invigorating, friendly fashion. What matter if the wind sings in the rigging, whispering, laughing, whistling to all who have ears to hear of how beautiful and wonderful is the world "beyond the skyline" and how fine a thing it is to sail away into a misty distance to see all the wonder of it for oneself ? What matter if little shafts of sunlight slide down and dance on the waves with gleeful sparkles, calling to black-robed humans to open their hearts to Hope and let little birds of Immortality whisper comfort ? What matter all these good things, and all good things whatsoever, if the soil is still so broken and new where the fine old sailor put safely into port for the last time ; leaving an almost penniless lassie, who has shared his life of true Irish improvidence

for twenty-four years, to face the blasts of a heartless world alone? If, beside the lovely natural harbour, hiding itself so cunningly behind sandhills and islands from the storms that sweep the Bay of Donegal, Patrick Mahon may still take his little sailing boat in and out, with all the careless dare-devilry of his race, and tramp over the heather after grouse for miles, perfectly content with just the smell and the sight and the sound of it, whether he shoot his bird or not, but no longer accompanied in all exploits by a rough-haired, bright-eyed tom-boy, in big boots, hatless, coatless—for ever unafraid?

What matter anything—anything—if these cruel things may be, and a hastening, unsympathetic ship carry us away to a strange land of strange people, while our heart is locked fast with iron bands in the heart of dear Donegal? Crow or no crow—irritation or no irritation—young despot in the chair or old woman—we are an exile, driven out from our Garden of Eden, and it seems, surely, nothing can save our heart from breaking.

But one thing may ease it a little for the moment—just to tell Pat all about it. To write sheets and sheets imploring him to visit the grave every day and to brush the red setter and the spaniel twice a week, and to give Cusheen a pennyworth of cream every Sunday when her kittens are not looking; and on no account to sell the pony to anyone unless they promise to pet and humour it, and to refuse all tenants for the little draughty old house unless they look as if they could love it! And, of all things, not to forget her for a moment, until her months of exile are over and her little inheritance of £75 a year has become her very own; and no one in all the wide world can prevent her from flying wildly back to Donegal and the little draughty house, to reign there happily ever after, in full and proud possession of that splendid income.

And here, a thought crept in uninvited; a thought that necessitated the laying down of the pencil and a sudden studying of the waves; a thought that brought a half-shy expression into the wistful Irish eyes, so lately all sparkles, as of a child's mind voyaging unexpectedly into unexplored country.

When the dreadful months were over and she sped back to the ramshackle dwelling scarcely worth calling a house and to old Biddy, the housekeeper-maid-of-all-work, what would Pat be like, then? What would they be like to each other?

Pat had a whole hundred pounds a year and a little land that he fondly called a farm, although it had never grown anything more than it could possibly help—except weeds—since the last cataclysm of nature left it in its present position—a little too high up the mountain to be arable and a little too low down the mountain to escape being a marsh. Of course it wasn't a marsh—Pat would be ready to black your eye for you with Irish speed if you ventured the suggestion in his hearing—but also, you couldn't say particularly that it was anything else. So wise folk left the question alone, and shot his snipe with him, and the grouse higher up the mountain, to which he had no manner of right whatever. And Pat continued to invest a little of his small income in seeds, which old O'Neil duly planted, and which sometimes came up, but more often gave in to the weeds and were seen no more. Pat thought it a little hard that seedsmen against whom he had nothing in the world should combine to sell him bad seed, and that even Nature herself apparently delighted to frustrate what he was pleased to call his *efforts*; but as long as the tourists never discovered that particular bend in the river where the trout hid, and as long as his dilapidated sailing-boat held together, and could be coaxed in and out of the harbour on all likely and many unlikely days, he went on his serene and smiling way, gloriously content.

In that Eden they had all been gloriously content until the upheaval came—a community of people it was a brain-rest only to think about—foremost among them lazy, careless, dare-devil Pat, Commander Fitzgerald, R.N. (retired), and Kathleen, his daughter. The old sailor seemed not to want much else in the world except a view of the Bay, a telescope, and a warm corner from which he could watch for ships of interest that never came and were never likely to come, and

hear quickly the joyful sound of the returning feet of his treasure. Pat only wanted his gun, his sailing boat, and his fishing-rod, and, at intervals, the luck to obtain seeds that would condescend to grow in spite of weeds and marsh. Kathleen, or Kitt, or "Acushla," as they often called her, wanted her father first and Pat second and the sight and sound and smell of Donegal third. These three held for her such satisfaction as few mortals ever find upon earth—up to the day when the bolt fell and the fine old sailor sailed away into the unknown. Then came a black period of dismay and terror; leaving, after its passing, that inartistic, black-garbed figure on the outward-bound steamer, like a "crow on a tombstone"—and, incidentally, a pair of wistful eyes, with a suggestion of shyness, gazing at the waves, while a scrawly letter of inordinate length is temporarily discontinued.

And Kitt was still gazing wistfully, with a half-formed, wholly sweet picture in her mind of a house where she and Pat might live together on their splendid incomes, when the captain strolled up to her. Tired of pointless questions he could not answer unless he possessed occult powers, his keen, all-enveloping eye had taken in the solitary young passenger, in mourning garb, sitting apart, and he turned aside to speak to her. But Kitt did not want to be spoken to, and her manner was unresponsive to a degree as she replied to his kindly enquiries. Captain Macdonald understood her mood, and having quietly suggested that she might look to him to see after her well-being on the voyage, glanced at the forbidding newspaper, still screening that other passenger who wanted about a third of the deck for himself.

"Good morning, Mr. Lutterworth. After moose again?" he asked pleasantly, recalling a former voyage when they had been on the same ship.

The newspaper was drawn a little to one side, but not a fraction more than common politeness required.

"Just for a few weeks," replied the occupant of the chair.

"I hear they are getting scarcer and scarcer, and the hunters have to go much farther afield."

"So much the better; there will be fewer hunters."

Something in the curt tone caught Kitt Fitzgerald's attention, and she half-turned her head to see what manner of selfish person it was that had so successfully secured the warmest spot of sunshine, and wanted moose reserved for a favoured few. Norman was still feeling annoyance, and he did not trouble to hide it, so that the shadow of a scowl rested on his face, as he looked irritably past the captain out to sea. Kitt decided he was a peevish-looking, unattractive young man, and straightway dismissed him from her mind. The captain made a further remark and moved away. Norman retired once more behind his barrier, and to his sense of irritation, but this was counteracted a little, he found, by a slight curiosity. Most young women have a great deal to say to the captain of a ship, especially if they are travelling alone, and it was noticeable to him, as a frequent voyager, that her reception of the commander's kindly overtures was decidedly chilly. Recalling it he lowered the newspaper to take a glance at her, lest perchance a turn of the head should reveal her features; and he observed as he did so that her whole atmosphere had a detached, indifferent air—which was consoling.

"At least," he decided, "she won't encourage other passengers to come and gabble here, and probably she will never turn her head my way at all. She is bound to see that I am determined not to be sociable, and if she wants companionship, she will move away."

Kitt did not want companionship, but she decided to move away at that identical moment, in search of a possible book to relieve the tedium of the voyage; and rising suddenly from her seat, she faced him before he had time to manipulate his protective screen. For the space of a second they looked into one another's eyes.

"What a crosspatch! . . ." Kitt's brain registered.

"Heavens! What a hat! . . ." flashed through Norman's mind. "Thank goodness, she chooses to sit facing the other way! . . ."

CHAPTER III.

NORMAN'S VERDICT.

ON the morrow Norman again had the annoyance of finding the black-robed figure calmly bent upon obtaining a little sun and shelter in his corner ; but, as the morning wore on, it became so obvious he was of no more interest to her than an empty deck-chair, that he was able to banish her from his thoughts, and relax his protective instinct.

It is worthy of note that Kitt neither observed the barrier, nor the withdrawal of it. Her one glimpse of her companion had been so uninviting, that she looked no more in his direction, but with a book open on her knee, to deceive people into the belief that she was reading, sat and gazed at the sea, mourning her father and dreaming of Patrick Mahon.

It was about three days later, in the middle of such a dream, while adding a little more to her lengthy epistle, that an impish wind came suddenly, when no one had any reason to expect it, and, making a swift descent upon her carelessly-guarded letter, tossed it across the deck with fiendish glee, blowing two sheets on to Norman Lutterworth's knees, a third sheet to a perilous position by the rail, and another gaily out to sea. With an exclamation of dismay, Kitt sprang to her feet, uncertain for the moment whether to grab the one by the rail or the two hovering upon Norman. Then, seeing that he had the two safely in hand, she darted at the other, only to see it blow out of reach as she grabbed.

A second later, Norman was out of his chair and had caught it, though not, it must be confessed, with any

relaxation of his grim expression. As he handed them to her, he glanced after the one floating behind the ship, and remarked with characteristic dryness :

"I am afraid you will be under the painful necessity of writing one sheet over again."

"Not at all, at all," she replied, with her pretty suggestion of brogue. "The letter can just go with one sheet missing. Thank you for saving these."

In spite of his unsociable intentions, he could not help observing : "A letter with a whole sheet missing sounds as if it might be difficult to make any sense of—anyhow, if it happens to be a middle sheet."

"My letters are often like that, but Pat is used to it. It won't be the first time I've left out the most important part. I daresay he'll guess what happened."

She spoke so frankly and naturally, that Norman found himself taking a more observant look at her face. As if she understood his action, she gravely returned his scrutiny. Then a little impish smile tilted the corners of a fascinating mouth, and she said :

"I daresay we are neither of us as objectionable as we think each other."

Norman stiffened instantly. Levity at that early stage of their acquaintance seemed to him unbecoming—in fact, almost vulgar.

No doubt she was the sort of modern young woman who, given an inch, promptly takes an ell.

His instinct was to head her off at once, and secure their former frigid attitude. Before he could frame a sufficiently suppressing rejoinder, however, she calmly added : "But we may as well go on thinking the same. It evidently suits you as well as it does me."

"Then it would certainly appear to be the wisest course," he snapped, and returned to his chair. Kitt did likewise, vaguely aware that she had behaved oddly, but not particularly interested in the fact.

Norman went on with his book, feeling a little fresh irritation without knowing why. Anyhow, he felt, she had no business to be so unexpected. Where in the world had she grown up, and what sort of a life had she led? He tried once more to dismiss her from his

thoughts, and found himself reading between the lines of his book that the rare combination of black hair and eyes of a violet blue was wonderfully attractive, even if the hair was twisted up anyhow, and the eyes a little swollen as with recent weeping, and the *tout ensemble* included a badly cut, badly fitting, obnoxious garb. He called his mind to order, and read a few more paragraphs, to find presently that he was considering the odd little tilt of her lips, that was a smile, yet not a smile.

Finally, being something of an original himself, he decided that it might be amusing to meet her on her own ground, and frankly dispensing with conventionalities, say the thing that came first into his mind. He got up as if to go for his usual midday promenade round the deck, and stood a moment beside her chair. "Why did you say we are, perhaps, neither of us as objectionable as we think each other?"

She turned her eyes to his ponderingly, and paused, as if recalling herself to the present from some far space.

"I suppose, because it was the first thing that occurred to me, and the most obvious."

"I don't see that it was obvious, at all."

She seemed to consider again, gazing at the waves in no hurry to reply. Norman waited. Evidently with an original of this type it was a wise thing to do. At last she spoke.

"Any duffer could see you were vexed because I sat here. I could feel it through my back, without even looking at you. As it did not matter to me whether you were vexed or not, I stayed on."

"Yes. I gathered that."

"Well, you hadn't bought the ship!"

"Your conversation suggests suffragettism in an advanced form—and yet——" He looked at her a little quizzically.

"We haven't time for suffragettes in Donegal," she volunteered. "We don't even read the newspapers."

"Then you must be rather behind the times."

"We don't mind if we are."

"I wonder if you mind anything?"

"Only having to go away, and—and——" Tears suddenly swam in her eyes, and he pulled himself up, feeling that he had been almost brutal.

"I am sorry," he said shortly. "I wouldn't have intruded upon your thoughts, but I was curious to know how you would explain that first remark."

"It's all right," she answered, brushing her hand across her eyes. "We needn't disturb each other much, if we just make an occasional remark when we are curious."

She picked up her discarded book, and he moved away, conscious of an undercurrent of relief. Evidently for the remainder of the voyage, they could sit as before without any likelihood of her becoming a nuisance. He did not see her at all in the afternoon, and in the evening she read in a corner of the saloon, with an air of detachment that effectually repelled any friendly overtures from the other passengers. Norman went outside and smoked under the stars, dreaming once more of the pathless woods and untrodden spaces to which he journeyed, lying mute and still under those same glowing worlds.

Next morning she came on deck later than usual, and seated herself without so much as glancing at him or saying "good morning." Norman decided he was glad, and went on peacefully with his book.

But after an hour the old curiosity began to prick again, and he found himself getting restive. It was all very well to be unsociable—within limits, but now that they had once spoken to each other, to say nothing at all, not even "good morning," was absurd. Once more he got up and halted near the rail beside her.

"I believe you are even more unsociable than I?" he hazarded.

"Perhaps." Then, after a slight pause, and with a little twitch of the mobile lips: "But I am not bad-tempered over it."

"Oh! Does that mean that you think I am?"

"You look it, anyway."

"Very likely. I see no earthly reason why one should

be pestered by this lot"—and with a scornful gesture he signified the whole passenger list.

"That is exactly what you looked."

"Did I?" He spoke shortly, not quite sure if he liked her outspoken criticism, or not.

The lips tilted a little. Evidently it was natural to this sad, dejected, black crow, under happier circumstances, to take a humorous view of life.

"What Pat calls a 'dog-in-the-manger' look," she informed him.

"I wonder you weren't afraid to sit so near, unprotected,"—a trifle cuttingly.

"I'm never afraid," and her simplicity was that of a child.

Again he glanced at her quizzically. "Doesn't that sound a little boastful?"

"I don't know—it's just true—there's nothing to be afraid of in Donegal."

"Not even mice?"

She did not condescend to reply.

"I wonder if you will learn to be afraid in Canada?" he suggested, and his voice had almost a friendly note.

"I think not." She turned her head away as if his conversation wearied her, quick at any time to resent a rebuff, he moved away with unlooked-for suddenness—feeling vaguely annoyed that anyone so dowdy as Kitt should not be more gratified by his voluntary unbending.

Three more days passed before he learnt where she was going, and then they were scarcely twenty-four hours distant from Montreal. Each day she had maintained her unresponsive attitude, merely exchanging a few sentences when he sought her. Norman sometimes felt that no one had so irritated him in all his life. He began to tell himself that she gave herself airs out of all reason. Had she been beautiful or celebrated, or, indeed, anything except a badly-dressed slip of a girl, with an ivory-white skin, a mobile mouth, and nothing specially attractive save her Irish eyes and her colouring, it would have been different. The male in him unconsciously assumed the didactic. Of course she *ought* to try and please: it was her duty. Only perfection

could dare to scorn every art of pleasing. All through that third day he left her severely alone. Anyhow, in two days' time, they would necessarily go their separate ways, to meet no more, so why take the trouble even to be irritated? In the evening, however, she greatly surprised him, by coming up to his quiet corner where he smoked his cigar under the stars, and asking, with her usual abruptness: "Can you tell me what I am to do in Montreal?"

For a moment the question rather took his breath away, and he repeated, a little vaguely: "What you are to do in Montreal?"

"Yes. I thought we just landed, and got into a train at once. I hear we arrive in the afternoon, and the train does not go until the next morning."

"Are you going by the Canadian Pacific?"

"Yes. To Kneller."

"And where, I wonder, is Kneller?"

"Somewhere on the north shore of Lake Superior, I believe."

"In the backwoods? . . ."

"I believe so."

"Good heavens! . . ."

"Why do you say that?"

"You'll hate it like—like poison."

"I think I hate anything outside Donegal; so it doesn't matter."

In the dim light of the deck lamps he watched her curiously. She stood with one hand on the rail, and her eyes fixed upon a silvery gleam where the moon shone on the waves; and she was so expressionless and detached that she looked like a statue. If the Celt always works better away from his beloved Ireland, developing an energy not to be found in the enervating atmosphere of the Emerald Isle, so, also, he probably suffers a deeper, keener nostalgia for his own green vales than falls to the lot of others, withdrawing into himself, and hiding his sorrow, often because it is so close to his innermost heart, and so sacred. And now Norman felt that her very passionlessness of mien proclaimed a depth of hungry longing and acute feeling

in her heart, that she simply dared not face. She dared only to gaze across the waves, as one who was forbidden visions, and would fiercely try not to see.

"Are you going for long?" he asked, unable to resist his curiosity.

"About nine months."

"And then back to Donegal?" He felt his questioning bad taste, but he wanted to see if her face would change.

The features did not relax—only the statue stood there—but into the eyes there crept something that was like a smothered radiance.

"Yes—back to Donegal—for ever."

He withdrew into his shadow a little. It occurred to him that Life might be rather interesting if it held a desire and a love like hers, be it only for what was probably a dirty little Irish seaport. Well, it was not his rôle to know nostalgia for anything, and never had been, and no doubt he had the greater peace; but that was no reason why he should not feel a passing interest in the phase in some one else. He did feel it, and it made him lean forward and, while he casually knocked the end off his cigar, remarked: "It won't be the same after a year. You'll see fresh people, and fresh things, and something of the world, and when you go back you'll find your Eden nothing but a commonplace little cabbage patch, and you'll marvel why you ever minded leaving it."

She did not trouble even to refute the monstrous imputation. She only turned her face a little and gave him one slow look. Norman experienced a sensation of smallness that was new to him, and made him feel as if he hardly recognised himself. And yet she was still so extraordinarily passionless. Her eyes did not blaze with scorn or wrath. She merely looked at him like a being from another planet, who felt the gulf of non-comprehension between them so wide that it wasn't worth while to try and bridge it.

Puzzled, he remembered her first remark on the steamer, and the little upward tilt of the lips. What mood had that been, and why had it come no more?

What a contradiction she must be ! What in the world would they make of her, he wondered, in rough and ready Canada ? At the same time her manner nettled him.

" You see if I'm not right," he insisted. " In a year's time it will all be different, and you'll be quite lukewarm, if not actually bored, about going back."

Still she made no reply. His insinuations were beneath her. She made him feel that this was her attitude, and suddenly he longed, quite absurdly, to give her a good shaking. The knowledge that what he felt was a matter of utter indifference to her was scarcely soothing. In an effort to recover his equanimity he changed the subject.

" You will have to go to an hotel for the night."

A troubled expression crossed her eyes. " I have never been to an hotel—alone—in my life. And only once, for one night, to any hotel."

Norman leaned back in his chair and smoked his cigar unsympathetically. She had chosen to treat him with indifference all the way over, and now he saw no reason why he should trouble himself about her nervous qualms.

" Which do you think I ought to go to ? " she asked at last.

He hesitated. It was rather a delicate point, seeing he was going to the best one himself. At last he answered coldly : " The Westminster is the best hotel." He meant to say nothing further, but a little unmanageable spirit made him add, contrary to his intention : " I am going there myself."

" Are you ? I'm glad "—with warmth.

He was taken by surprise and faint alarm, but before he could reply, she added, " Good night," in the most casual tone, and walked away.

Norman stood staring hard at the patch of moonlight silvering the waves.

" The oddest young woman I ever came across," was his verdict finally.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CATASTROPHE.

IT seemed to come about more or less unavoidably on the following day that he should take her under his wing ; just as if she were a governess or companion of his household. She wore the obnoxious hat, and looked badly dressed in a way that fretted his fastidious soul, but perhaps it did not matter in Canada, where one was a complete stranger. At home he was most particular about any companion of the fair sex being well turned out, and usually only troubled to be squire to women who were perfectly gowned. That he should be voluntarily playing the knight to a positive freak made him smile inwardly with sardonic humour.

He decided to establish her quickly in the hotel, and there leave her to her own devices. Kitt's intuition was too keen for her not to glean something of this, and without troubling to resent it, she merely placed him a little lower in her estimation. As a matter of fact, he was somewhat low already, for by no single action had he ingratiated himself into her good graces. She accepted his aid merely because she felt so lost and alone in a strange city, after her secluded life. On the morrow she would be leaving by the westward-bound train, and then they would doubtless never meet again. Under the circumstances, even if she did not like him, it was better than being entirely alone ; and she had rather foolishly repulsed any overtures from other passengers.

So they drove to the hotel together, scarcely speaking, and Norman said if she liked to go to her room as soon as they had had something to eat, he would book her

seat on the train, and she need not worry about anything more until morning.

The hotel was very full, and there was a general air of flurry owing to an electricians' strike, which threatened to leave them at any moment without electric light. This annoyed Norman still further, and in his irritation he spoke rather shortly when ordering their rooms. Neither were matters improved by the fact that they were so late dinner was nearly over.

To dress now meant lukewarm food, so he hurried Kitt into the dining-room, and they ate a perfunctory meal almost in silence; he feeling thoroughly bad-tempered and at no special pains to hide it, and Kitt too homesick and miserable to care what he was like.

After dinner she went off to bed, afraid lest at any moment her tears should fall; while Norman went out for a walk and dropped into a music-hall to pass the time.

Electric light had already been dispensed with in the bedrooms, and lamps and candles substituted, but Kitt scarcely noticed the fact. The moment she was alone, the tears forced their way through and blinded her, leaving her oblivious to everything except a longing to hide her head under the sheets. Most disastrously oblivious to the circumstances that whereas she possessed but one humble canvas "hold-all" with her things for the night, a handsome suit-case, and despatch-box were also in the room.

The big, luxurious bed surprised her a little, but it was an easy matter to creep under the eiderdown and curl up in one corner beneath the sheltering sheet, to cry her heart out until she fell asleep from exhaustion.

She had not troubled to unpack, and her clothes lay in a little heap, half hidden by the curtains of the bed, so that anyone coming in late, somewhat preoccupied, might easily be deceived into imagining the room was empty. Indeed, it never entered Norman's head to suppose anything else, as rather sleepily, and with much annoyance at having to put up with candle-light, he

unpacked his suit-case and undressed. An oil lamp on a little table by the bed caught his attention, and as he usually read himself to sleep, he lit it to see if it gave a good enough light.

Having done so, he was about to get into bed, when, to his horror and amazement, he saw the outline of a lump disturbing the smoothness of the eiderdown quilt.

Something was in the bed, but in the name of goodness, what!

Swiftly and carefully he turned back the clothes, to discover with growing horror Kitt's black head protruding from her curled-up body, and tucked almost under her arm.

"Good God!" he gasped, completely staggered by the dumbfounding situation.

The sudden light and the cold air roused the sleeper, and with almost petrified alarm he saw that she was about to open her eyes. Only one instinct possessed him. If possible to get away before she awoke, and never let her know of the monstrous mistake the hotel people had made. But his very haste was his undoing. In turning away quickly, he knocked over the table with the lighted lamp, and before he could move a finger to avert the catastrophe, blazing oil was running over the carpet.

"Get up! Get up!" he exclaimed hastily. "The room is on fire. Put something over you while I call for help."

Dazed with sleep, Kitt sat up and looked round her, wondering where in the world she was. Then the flames caught her eyes, and she sprang out of bed, and snatched at the first garment procurable. It happened to be Norman's overcoat.

A moment later he rushed back with fire extinguishers, followed not only by night porters, but by various visitors on the landing who had heard his hurried call for help, and whose number was augmented every second. Kitt was too dazed to fight her way through them. She stood bewildered, wrapped in Norman's overcoat, until some one half-dragged her out into the

passage. After her, pell-mell, came all her belongings and Norman's, inextricably mixed.

She was too dazed even to note the alarming significance when some one said to her: "Won't you come out of the smoke? Your husband is helping to put out the fire. He is sure to be with you in a minute."

Already blackened with smoke, Norman carried something from the room, and, still unheeding, she heard a voice say to him: "Your wife is all right. I saw her a minute ago." Then Norman went back.

And out in the passage, for all to see, was her luggage and his, dragged from the same room, at midnight.

And still the alarming significance, the whole of the disaster involved, did not dawn upon her. In the confusion she managed at last to slip a little distance away from the agitated crowd, and when the agitation died down, knew only that the flames had been conquered splendidly, and the hotel saved from a possible disaster that made one shiver.

Then at last the manageress came to her, and in a kindly voice told her another room was ready, and advised her to go to bed quickly.

"Your husband will join you very soon," she added. "He is rather overcome with the smoke. He worked magnificently to put out the fire."

Kitt looked at her with blank non-comprehension; and a second later Norman himself stood before her, wearing a mackintosh over his pyjamas.

"I was just advising madam to go to bed quickly, and try to rest," said the manageress.

"Yes. It will be the wisest plan."

Kitt wondered what had happened to Norman's voice, and why he looked at her so strangely.

"I have a room on the floor below," he added. "I will tell them not to disturb you until you ring in the morning. You will feel better if you sleep the shock away."

Then, with that strange expression in his eyes, he led her towards the room the manageress indicated, and took her in.

"Good night," he said. "Get all the sleep you can."

A startled expression crept into Kitt's face. Something about his indefinable manner, brought back suddenly those stray sentences, and before he closed the door she heard the manageress say distinctly:

"I hope madam has all that he needs?"

And she heard Norman, still with that indefinable change in his voice, that made it sound like a stranger speaking, answer her, "Yes, thank you. She will be better to rest. I must see to my things."

Then the extent of the catastrophe began to knock at the door of her understanding.

CHAPTER V.

NORMAN HAS A FIERCE STRUGGLE.

NORMAN ate a late breakfast the next morning feeling as if he wanted to take Fate by the throat and strangle her. Through what unprecedented devilry had she dared to entangle him, of all people, in such a monstrous situation?

In fact, so monstrous was it, he scarcely felt able to face it yet. Thank goodness, Kitt was still sleeping an exhausted sleep, and he had a little longer to fortify himself.

But would those fools in the hotel never leave off enquiring after "madam"?

Each kind inquiry made him feel more murderous towards the inquirer, and he scarcely knew where it might end.

To get up and solemnly declare that she was not "madam" was only a little more unthinkable than to assume that she was.

Anyhow, the easiest course at the moment was to growl an almost indistinguishable reply. And though Norman had often been declared a "bear" of a very acute type, he had never before even come within sight of his bearishness that morning. Nearly all night long he had paced his room.

Exhaustion might mercifully close Kitt's eyes, but no such oblivion came to him.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, he found himself in a desperate situation, and all the ingenuity of his brain could see no satisfactory way out. To repudiate the relationship thrust upon him on all sides, was probably to smirch Kitt's reputation for ever. To accept it was

voluntarily to load himself with heavy fetters he had done nothing to deserve.

Backwards and forwards he paced, and no ray of light broke on the gloom. A glimmer came when he thought of his engagement to Hester Strange. Could he break faith with her? Did not his promise to his aunt safeguard him? But the glimmer passed almost before it had showed. The woman who would be hurt the most *must* come first; and she, beyond any question, was Kitt. How in the world she had failed to notice his belongings puzzled him, except for the circumstance of the dim light, and her evident nearness to tears which he had divined at dinner. Of course these two, in conjunction, must be answerable for it. Then he fell to wondering what in the world she thought of the situation herself. Had it penetrated yet, with all it involved, to that dreamy, preoccupied brain of hers? And if so, what would be her solution?

There was not a soul in the hotel who did not believe them to be husband and wife. If he tried to explain what had happened, who would believe his story? Certainly they might pretend to, but who could gauge their innermost thoughts? It was known they arrived on the steamer together, and Kitt's meagre luggage had not even a label to proclaim her other than Mrs. Lutterworth. If only she had noticed the mistake before he came in! If only he had come in early, instead of at an hour which only added to the damning evidence!

"If—if—if——" His brain was in a whirl with the futility of it. No "ifs" could help them now. No day of the future left them safe from the possible result of the night's catastrophe. Wherever they went, whether alone or together, the story might rise up to meet them from some unexpected quarter. If they were together, it would not matter much; if separate, it left them in a hopelessly false position, which might have disastrous effects for Kitt. "Man's inhumanity to man" might place the worst construction upon the situation, and follow her with a cruel calumny against which she could not defend herself.

No, there was only one way out.

The more he thought of it, driving his brain this way and that in search of escape, the more relentlessly he felt the bars of the trap. Together—there was safety. Separated—and with her maiden name—Kitt could never be quite secure again. It was only with *his* name, security lay for her.

Therefore, when the morning broke, Norman knew what he must do. He felt that the only course was marriage. He must go to her and explain the gravity of the situation, if she had not yet grasped it, and offer to marry her at once. That she was an orphan, alone in a strange country, only made him feel the need more urgent. She had no one else to protect her. He had been the cause of the disaster. It remained for him to make what reparation lay in his power; and that surely was to give her a right to the name which alone made her secure.

But it went hardly with him. He scarcely dared stop to think of it at all. On the voyage she had piqued his curiosity, but she had not attracted him, and he had contemplated with some relief that they would go their separate ways on the morrow, probably for ever.

And now!

He ground his teeth and clenched his hands, feeling his fingers literally tingle to strangle something—anything.

The "break" with Hester would be difficult enough. Certainly his aunt would never forgive him. But what, after all, was anything compared with the horror of a marriage such as he felt himself bound to make? Must not the very circumstances of their union make them hate each other; or, at any rate, rob them of any real pleasure in each other's society? Yet, without it, what peace for her if calumny dogged her steps? What peace for him, knowing himself the innocent cause?

No wonder he was bearish, as he struggled with breakfast, growling out indistinguishable replies to all the kind enquiries for "madam," or for "your wife."

After breakfast he set himself to wait for her. Of

course, they would have to go out somewhere to have their talk. They could not enter into explanations with possible hotel "ears" listening. No doubt she would come down soon, and then he could take her for a drive to some spot where they could talk undisturbed.

But the morning wore on, and there were no signs of her whatever. Norman wandered restlessly about, up and down the corridors, anxious not to miss her; hoping each footstep was hers, that the suspense might be ended; relieved each time that he found he had a little longer to breathe.

And after a while another wave of indecision swept over him. He had had time to realise more fully all he proposed to give up: to see his action in a quixotic light. And he was no Don Quixote. He never had been. All his life he had been pampered and spoiled, waited on and considered in all things. The wonder was not that he was selfish, but that he was not more selfish. Probably he would have been if he had not been too lazy, and blessed with a sense of humour. The two together made it not worth while. To a great extent he asked merely "to live and let live." Suddenly to be brought face to face with such a demand as was now made upon him almost stupefied him. The quixotic aspect did not appeal to him in the least. Don Quixotes were mostly fools. He had no desire whatever to join their ranks. He only wanted to go peacefully after his moose. It seemed incredible, impossible, that his carefully-arranged plans should miscarry. A yearning swept over him at the thought of the pathless woods, and the camp fires, and his old hunter waiting for him.

The life of the wild was his hobby and delight, when the trammels of civilisation galled. Surely—surely—everything was not to be spoilt now! For a brief while his thoughts ran away with him. What a good thing she had been so long in coming down—it had given him time to change his mind before it was too late. He would let her speak first, and see what solution she had arrived at. And if she was not conscious of any risk, why! surely they could leave well alone, and chance

the future! He would express his deep regret, and offer to make any explanation she might wish, and then they could go their several ways. He raised his head, and a light came into his eyes. He could almost smell those vast forests, and the crackling wood fire. How splendid was the mere thought of freedom!

So the morning wore on, and still she did not come. What in the world was she doing?

He fell to wondering about her attitude in the case. What did she think of it in her heart of hearts? Was she perhaps dreadfully upset, and feeling unable to face him?

Yes, of course—that was why she did not come! She was nervous of meeting him in public—possibly nervous of meeting him at all.

Poor little girl! What a wretched affair it was. No doubt she was crying when she went to bed. She had looked so forlorn at dinner. Because he was selfish more from habit than by nature, his sympathy with her began to gain ground. He felt he would give half his income if she could have gone on her way that morning as arranged, and the events of the night had never happened at all. What a shame it was, just when she was so broken-hearted, that this wretched affair should follow upon the rest! He wondered again how she was taking it, and the wonder grew momentarily.

Would she never come?

Finally he decided that the suspense was too vexing, and he must send for her. Somehow he must arrange to have a private talk with her. Accordingly, he engaged a sitting-room, and sat down to write her a little note. It proved a most difficult task, and in the end he was thoroughly dissatisfied with the result. Reviewing gloomily what he wrote, it swept over him once more that there was no halfway course possible. Whether he hated it or not, he *must* offer to make the only reparation of any avail. He must save her from her false position, by giving her a right to the name everybody had concluded was hers.

Distrusting his own determination, he decided to put it down in black and white, and thus compel himself

to stand by it. Finally he sent a note upstairs which ran :

" I have been waiting to see you all morning. Do please come down and let us decide what to do. Ask some one to show you the way to my sitting-room, and we shall be quite undisturbed. I am only waiting to tell you that my name is entirely at your service. Every one in the hotel takes it for granted that you are Mrs. Lutterworth. I can never forgive my stupidity for the mistake that has engulfed us in this hopeless tangle of misunderstandings, but I can only add that I am ready to make any reparation in my power, and if you wish it, to smooth things out by getting quietly married at once."

CHAPTER VI.

A CLASH OF STEEL.

WHEN Kitt received the note she was standing at her bedroom window, looking across the square with a pucker between her eyebrows. In truth she was utterly perplexed.

A child by nature, and naïve to a degree, she was yet in some things more of a woman than were many of her age. Her father had made so great a companion of her, that he had sometimes forgotten she was a mere girl, and had talked freely to her of things about which many girls are foolishly left in ignorance; moreover, being a sensible, straightforward man, who hated shams and glozing, he had influenced her to look upon life with candid, open eyes and mind. In consequence, Kitt had a woman's knowledge, with a soul as pure as a child's. This knowledge of hers had brought revelation with the morning light; but beyond being perplexed, she was not, in any way, perturbed as was Norman, because the purity of her soul kept her unafraid. She was chiefly concerned as to whether she ought to offer any explanation before she left the hotel, and if so, to whom?

When Norman's letter became clear to her, it took her breath away. Such a solution as he proposed had never entered her head for a moment. She read it twice through, and a red spot came into her white cheeks, while from beneath her long lashes, a gleam as of steel shot through her eyes.

She felt vaguely as if some one had struck her; and in a blind, confused way was conscious of violently

resenting something she could not explain. In the embrasure she stood so still that she seemed turned to stone, yet her quick brain was more alert than it had been for weeks, than it had been at any time since her father died. The thought of Pat crossed her mind, and she wished wildly that he were there to avenge this indefinable insult, for it was as an insult Norman's letter appeared to her. Homesickness tried to seize her, but she faced it resolutely, and kept all her attention fixed upon the present. After a time, with tight lips, and head held high, she went in search of Norman in his private sitting-room.

He was standing with his back to the door as she entered, glowering gloomily out, full of pity for himself, and hoping to goodness she would not cry.

As she closed the door behind her, he faced round, and no effort, if, indeed, he made one, chased any of the gloom from his face. It was this gloom Kitt's quickened senses noted instantly to the exclusion of all else. He opened his lips as if to utter some stereotyped formality, and then stood still, without saying a word. Kitt did likewise, and they looked at one another across the table in silence. Norman said nothing, because, in some unaccountable way, he was so taken aback, the things he had meant to say died out of his mind. All through his restless, driven night and morning, he had pictured her solely as the forlorn, spiritless, homesick, heartsick companion of the previous evening's dinner and most of the voyage, with perhaps an occasional variation as the silent, white-faced dreamer. The girl who stood before him now was a revelation to him. She might almost have been some stranger come in Kitt's place. The red spot had spread, and her cheeks were flushed as with a glow of anger under the skin. Her eyes had darkened strangely, and wore a directness that was disconcerting. Scarcely able to believe his own vision, his brain registered wonderingly the impression that she was almost beautiful. At last he advanced a step, feeling the moment was becoming too embarrassing.

"You got my note?" he began lamely.

"Yes. I've come."

Suddenly he almost wished she would cry. It seemed as if anything would be better than this unaccountable calmness.

"Well, have you thought of a solution? Anything better than the one I offer?—that is to say, if you realise that a solution is necessary." His voice sounded exasperated. It began to be borne in upon him that in making his plans, he had overlooked the fact that she was something of an oddity, and had taken it for granted that she would follow the line most other women of his acquaintance would have done.

"I think you are making a very unnecessary fuss," she said quietly.

"My dear girl," and his tone of superiority deepened the flush a little, "you must see that it is an exceedingly awkward business—in fact, a damned awkward business . . . I look upon myself as the culprit. If it hadn't been for me it wouldn't have happened. As it is, to be blunt, and there is nothing whatever to be gained by beating about the bush, every one in this hotel knows that I upset a lamp in your room at midnight, and that all our luggage was there together. I suppose you know enough of the world to understand what circumstantial evidence means?"

"Surely it is easy enough to explain how the mistake was made?"

"Anyone could *explain*," he said bitterly. "Who is to ensure belief? What is to prevent the story following you, when there is no one at hand to explain?"

The pucker came back to her forehead, and she looked past him out of the window.

"Does it matter?" she asked at last in a non-committal tone, that gave him no clue to her true feelings.

"Does it matter!" he echoed. "Of course it matters. You can't possibly even gauge how much it might matter. No man of honour could leave things as they are. Every creature in this hotel has asked

after 'Madam' this morning, and what could I say?"

"You could have explained."

"And if I had explained, only fifty per cent. would have believed me. The others might have pretended to. But behind our backs they would have smiled. Don't you know the sort of smile? It was to save you from that I said nothing. And it is to save you from that still, that I am willing to marry you. It is the only solution?"

"Have you arranged it all?"

He wondered at her tone, and in the midst of a restless walk, swung round to look at her. She was still very erect and very quiet, but that fascinating upward tilt of her mobile lips was now a slight curl that puzzled him. It seemed to suggest that she was entirely indifferent to the sacrifice he was offering to make for her. Almost inclined to be scornful of it! What could one do with such a contradictory person? A child one moment—a homesick schoolgirl the next—an arresting woman the next.

It crossed his mind that it was rather funny he should have imagined her nervous about meeting him. She certainly was not. Hard upon that thought came again wonder at her appearance. Odd that he had never noticed before how lovely her skin was, nor the perfect contour of her face! He noted these things half unconsciously, while puzzling out the meaning of her attitude. Her neck must have been covered all through the voyage, or surely he would have noticed before its slender whiteness! And the blue-grey eyes were violet now, that rare Irish violet with the attractive shadows. But what did she mean? Irritated afresh, he enquired with a manner of still growing exasperation, and without pausing to consider how his words might sound:

"How do you mean—have I arranged it all? I've been waiting the whole morning to see you. I couldn't very well arrange anything until I had, could I? . . . Of course, it's perfectly simple. We can just go away to-morrow morning as if nothing unusual had

happened, and get quietly married somewhere by special licence."

"And then?"

"Then! Oh! then I suppose we shall live happy ever after, as in all the other fairy tales." But his expression was not pleasant; neither was the little laugh that accompanied his words.

It stung Kitt anew, and her face became a study of suppressed indignation, awaiting some psychological moment to burst its bounds. In that moment she was only conscious of hatred of him. The hot, unreasoning hate of the imaginative Celt.

All she said was: "And supposing your solution is not pleasing to me? You don't seem to have given any thought to that side of the question."

"I don't see that you have much choice. As I said before, it is just a damned awkward business, with only one way out. I'm sorry to use such language, but there is positively nothing else expresses it. Have you any better solution to offer if mine is not pleasing to you?"—sarcastically.

Still she did not speak, and again they faced each other. Then he made his crowning blunder. An evil sprite whispered to him that since she suddenly appeared so attractive, perhaps it would not be such a very dreadful business after all.

"I daresay it will be all right," he said. "I can't suppose I should make a good husband, but neither do I think I should make a bad one: just a half-and-half sort of one."

Then Kitt took a step nearer, and the steely glint in her eyes flashed, as she said with slow distinctness: "Well, you needn't trouble yourself either way, for you are certainly the last man in the world I have the slightest wish or intention to marry."

Her words stung him like a lash, and he changed colour angrily. "You are pleased to be cutting. Presumably you have a better solution to offer, then?"

"I don't know. I don't think I care. But I hope that you and I will never meet again."

He stared at her with vexed bewilderment in his face. Whatever her baffling attitude had meant, certainly he had not expected this.

"They always say women have no sense of gratitude." He spoke with bitterness. "I offer to make the utmost reparation in my power, and you treat it like this."

"You are not offering it for my sake. You are offering it for your own. Your sense of personal honour requires it, and to satisfy that honour, you propose a course you hate. You condescendingly offer to give me your name, to make me your wife, as a great concession; and you never stop to question whether I have any wish to become your wife; or, indeed, any wish in the matter whatever!"

The words were coming now, stammeringly, breathlessly, falling over each other in their haste to get themselves quickly uttered.

"I haven't seen much of the world, nor been in it much, but I know enough to realise that this proposal of yours is an insult--no question of love--no hope of happiness--just a detestable 'way out' you don't see how to avoid. At bottom I don't count for anything, or anyhow my feelings don't count. I couldn't believe the note at first. I thought I must have read it wrong. So I read it all through again. And the second time it only seemed worse. Then I came here, and I let you say all you had to say so that I might make sure of your real attitude. And your attitude was that you had only to offer to make the sacrifice, and I should gratefully accept it. Well, I don't. I tell you again, I think it is an insult. We didn't like each other on the ship. *You* know perfectly well we didn't. And we thought to go our ways and never meet again, and did not care in the least. Well, that is what we are going to do, except that it is with a different feeling. When we can't be indifferent, we Irish folk, we either love, or hate. And I hate you, and I don't mind telling you so." She threw her head back, and her breast heaved tumultuously. "Not all the scorn in the world would make me marry a man I did not love, just for

fear of what people might say, and I take it as an insult that you thought it would."

Under the tornado of wrath he stood almost transfixed. That anyone should rate him in such a manner was beyond belief—that he, the autocrat, the despot, the rich squire, should be scolded like some underling by this mere chit of a girl from some unheard-of hole in Donegal! But she paid not the slightest heed to his amazement, and ran on with tumbling, disjointed phrases.

"I don't care what they say. I don't care what anyone says. You may keep your freedom and go and shoot your moose, and feel your honour is satisfied because you have made this detestable offer. There is no reason for us ever to meet again, and if I can help it, we never shall."

She paused for breath, and in spite of his anger, Norman could not choose but feel some underglow of admiration at her whole-hearted intensity. Moreover, while she talked she had become strangely beautiful, for the glow of anger had warmed all her colouring. Drawn to her full height she was like a slender stripling of perfect grace; while the tilted angle of her head gave her the air of a young tragedy queen.

Thus for a few moments they confronted each other; and it was as though some strange magnetism began to work in Norman's breast, creating a bewildering sense of havoc. He felt himself more angry with her than he had ever been with anyone before; and yet at the same time all his pulses leapt with admiration for her—and not merely passive admiration. That he could have understood. But there was with it a swift desire to subdue her. His *laissez-faire* had forsaken him utterly. It was as if she had suddenly stabbed him awake. In the midst of his sense of confusion, she swung round towards the door, saying:

"Now that you know what I think about it, you may as well go and give the explanation you ought to have given at the first."

She took a step forward, but he was too quick for her, moving swiftly to the door, and standing with his back to it. Not for all the world could he have explained what had happened to him. He was only conscious that with amazing unaccountableness his whole being was up in arms against her scorn. She should *not* scorn him, this slip of an Irish girl, with her splendid colouring, and her fearlessness, and her slim, alluring grace.

To allow her to sweep out of the room, and leave him like a whipped hound was unthinkable. She might be all fire, and unreasonableness, and pride, but he had qualities of his own to pit against such ; and whatever he was, or was not, he had certainly never been the man to take a reverse "sitting."

His exasperation gave place to cool alertness.

"Well, anyhow you can't go rampaging through the hotel, offering explanations at this stage. If you care nothing for your own reputation, I have some care for mine, and I propose to safeguard it, whether you approve or not."

Again their eyes met, and it was like a clashing of steel between them. He faced her so steadily that in the end her gaze faltered, though her lips lost no whit of their firmness. He saw his slight gain, and continued resolutely.

"I don't know why you should regard it as a matter for scorn, that I should care so much about my personal honour. Anyhow, I do care. If I can help it, this unfortunate affair shall not soil it ; and to that end I want to do my uttermost to look after yours. An unlucky fate overtook us last night, against which we could not guard, but anyhow we can do our best this morning. I am still waiting to hear what better solution you can offer than mine ?"

She was again irritably silent, and he was at a loss to know how to proceed. "I think it is scarcely wise to offer belated explanations now"—he still stood with his back to the door—"it will only look as if we had met here to discuss how we should account for the incident."

"That is your fault!"—coldly. "If the explanation had been given at the proper time——"

"I acted as I thought seemed for the best. We are all liable to make mistakes. But I am not yet convinced that I did make one, or that my idea is a mistake"; and he watched her with a strange expression in his keen eyes.

Her magnetism was still drawing him on. But Kitt had turned her head away, and merely stared coldly out of the window.

"Unfortunately, there is no train we can very well take until to-morrow, as there is only one through express daily. We'd better leave together by that in the morning, and afterwards we can go our separate ways, and take our chances, if you wish it."

"Certainly, I wish it. I am not in the least likely to wish anything else."

For a moment he did not reply. He stood silently gazing hard into her face. And for no apparent reason that he could fathom, the thought crossed his mind that he should like to kiss her. Her mouth was almost on a level with his, for she was unusually tall, and the proud disdain that curled her lips seemed only to fill him with an overpowering desire to master her. He felt he wanted to pin her arms down to her side, and kiss her roughly and fiercely, daring her to scorn him. To rule was his accustomed right. To be scorned infuriated him, and filled him with a desire to conquer. It contained some other element as well—the element that was so bewildering—that, in the midst of his resentment, so strangely drew him and baffled him—mixing up, intolerably, anger and—— Ah! what was it that made him care whether she scorned or did not scorn? What was it that made her seem a stranger altogether to the silent, sorrowful girl on the ship? What had happened to his vision and to himself, that the woman he dreaded to meet, and wished only to banish from his life, had suddenly and mysteriously become desirable? While he still sought to read the riddle she turned her head slowly and looked at him with direct, fearless eyes.

"If you have nothing else to say, I should like to pass."

"I have a great deal else to say—but it can wait." He paused, and a curious change came over his face, an expression almost of veiled exultation. Then he went on: "You have said some scornful things during this interview. I shall not forget them. In fact I shall treasure them—and sooner or later—I shall make you take them back."

He came a step nearer. "Do you hear, Kathleen Fitzgerald?—sooner or later, *I shall make you take them back.*"

"I think not"—icily.

He gave a low laugh. "You may think what you like. It's what *I* think that matters. Listen to me, Kathleen"—growing yet bolder. "All my life things have come to me for the asking, and so they have had no savour. There's a new thought in my mind now that I cannot quite grasp, about something that has been refused me point-blank, and an offer flung back to me with scorn. If the desire for this mysterious something grows, I won't be thwarted. I swear I won't. You can go your way, and I will go mine, but if the desire lives, sooner or later I will make you take back what you have said to-day—if I have to follow you to the ends of the earth to do it." He paused, and then changed again suddenly to his old attitude. "In the meantime, shall we let the whole question lapse, while we decide what to do in the present emergency?"

"I decided long ago. I am going west as soon as I can."

"The mail train leaves to-morrow morning. I will book our seats. And if you will let me know if there is anything else I can do——"

"Thank you. There will be nothing else."

She kept her eyes averted, waiting with impatience for him to open the door. But he still stood for several seconds watching her. While he held the door he was master of the situation, if he never were again. Pride in that little advantage soothed his soreness somewhat. And, moreover, there was that dawning desire, mixed

so inextricably with his anger. It was growing now by leaps and bounds. He hated to let her go where he could not even see her.

But Kitt was quite equal to him. "I should be glad to pass, if you will allow me." There was scorn still in her voice.

He stood aside, and held the door open for her.

"It is your day now," he said quietly. "Mine will come."

But the exquisite lips only curled a little more proudly, as, with head erect, she passed out without vouchsafing him another glance.

CHAPTER VII.

FLIGHT.

TO explain lucidly the state of chaos in Kitt's mind is well-nigh impossible, for it was so largely the result of her Celtic temperament, and the unusual circumstances of her short twenty-four years. She scarcely remembered her mother at all, and had had almost no woman's influence in her life. She was, in consequence, undisciplined to a degree—a wild, wayward, warm-hearted, intense child of nature—accustomed to being a law unto herself—given to passionate loves and hates without much trouble of reasoning—following blindly some vague star, and inventing in a measure her own theories of life. In the glorious air of Donegal she had grown up as healthy and wholesome as a mountain wildflower; but, just as no one can safely prophesy what will be the result of transplanting a free-growing flower of the wilds to a garden, so no one could perfectly diagnose how Kitt's sudden transition to the civilised paths of man would affect her. Sometimes the flower will adapt itself to the change and become a lovely addition to the garden borders. Sometimes it will run riot in a distracting fashion, and spread disaster generally.

Her first instinct after the interview was to walk round the hotel telling every one that she was not Norman Lutterworth's wife; would rather die than be his wife under any conditions; and that it was the merest accident he should have upset a lamp in her room. It enraged her to feel that they all took it for granted she was Mrs. Lutterworth, and she burned with longing

to uncloak the monstrous lie. But as she stood for a moment in the lounge, and saw all the strange faces about her, reading in many an averted gaze the interest she could not choose but know she evoked, all her courage ebbed, and she only longed to slip away quickly and hide herself.

So she hastened back to her room on the verge of tears, terrified lest she should weep outright before she gained shelter. That this dreadful thing should have happened to her seemed too cruel. As if she had not enough to bear without it! Home-sickness swept over her, and she abandoned herself to low, heartfelt sobbing. Oh, to be once again in dear Donegal, with her father, and Pat, and all the joyful inconsequence of those old days! Would she ever know such happiness again in all her life? Could such happiness exist in any other conditions? If only Pat were there to comfort her—to settle once for all this dreadful man, who dared calmly to arrange to marry her because marriage appeared expedient! As if she were likely ever to marry anyone but Pat! Surely it was an understood thing, that when her exile was over, and she had her little "mite" to add to his, Pat and she would live in the old ramshackle house together! The joy of the thought increased her anger against Norman. He must have been mad to make such a proposition. How dared he coolly dispose of her future, without thought for anyone but himself! If only Pat were there he would soon show him what sort of a mistake he had made! As if it were going to matter to her and Pat what a few stupid people might say in Montreal! How could anyone be foolish enough to make such a fuss? Her goaded thoughts ran on, and always they incensed her steadily more and more against Norman. She wilfully encouraged these thoughts. She did not want to see in his action any gleam of self-sacrifice. Even if he had done the most generous and manly thing under the circumstances, she did not want to give him credit for it. Enough for her that he had coolly dared to take her from Pat, and dispose of her unconsulted. That Norman had bungled was undeniable, but so, with equal sureness, had he attempted to

do what seemed to him was required of him in the unexpected emergency. Kitt gave him credit only for bungling. Because it suited her mood to ignore his honest endeavour to right things, she ignored it—and that was Kitt all over! Now, as she sat alone, in like manner she longed to act for herself.

Why should she wait? Why should she go quietly away with him in the morning, just because he thought it advisable? She did not want to be guided by him. She hated the very sight and sound of the hotel. To get out of it, once and for all, seemed suddenly to become the one thing worth living for. If he knew, perhaps he would seek to prevent her, because of this ridiculous fad of his. Well, perhaps he need not know. Anyhow, nothing would induce her to dine and spend the evening with him, and she would show her determination at once, by having her lunch brought up to her bedroom. And, in the afternoon, she would walk out alone, and go to the railway station to learn for herself if any train leaving that evening would take her part of the way on her journey.

When Norman was politely informed at lunch that "Madam" was taking luncheon in her own room, he was not surprised. It was obvious that her anger against him was not of a kind to cool quickly, but he hoped she would have recovered sufficiently to endure his society at dinner, and give him a chance to observe her more closely. For, during the last three hours, this seemed to have become the central motive of his life. Moreover, his feelings were still so chaotic that he craved for another interview with her, so that he might perchance win to a clearer recognition of his own frame of mind. A quick walk before lunch, after she had flung away from him, found him abstractedly pacing the streets of Montreal, seeing in that interesting city almost nothing but a pair of glowing cheeks, a pair of angry eyes, and the mouth that so tantalised him. Of course, he was not in love with her. He would not admit the idea for a moment. He prided himself upon being far too much a man of the world to be bowled over all in a minute by any woman. Besides, she had behaved

most childishly, not to say disgracefully, in wilfully refusing to see anything from a rational point of view, or to show the smallest gratitude for his proffered reparation. Far from being in love with her, he was very angry with her, and would almost have liked to give her a good shaking. But there again the bewildering element came in. Why did he take the trouble to be angry with her? Why not, having made the offer he considered himself bound to make, and had it rejected, cast her out of his mind once and for all, and go on his way, rejoicing in his freedom? It was too maddening to find his thoughts continually reverting to her, and all his instinct clamouring with this absurd yet growing desire to subdue her.

But was it maddening?

His thoughts came to a dead halt. Was "maddening," in the sense of anger, the right word?

What was this undercurrent, inextricably enmeshed with his exasperation, so curiously like a dawn of gladness?

When he sat down to lunch, and the waiter told him quite naturally that "Madam" was not coming, he no longer wanted to wring either his neck or anyone else's. Instead, he felt faintly amused. He thought of her flashing eyes, and the red spot on her cheeks, and he wished she could have heard the perfectly matter-of-fact voice in which the announcement concluded them man and wife.

Then, was the humorous aspect beginning to dwarf all other aspects? Now that reparation had been offered and declined, was he sliding naturally back into his old groove of humorous indifference? Would the future go on exactly as planned, except for an extraordinary incident that had disturbed him grievously at the moment, but that, seen from the distance of a few hours, was chiefly amusing?

In the afternoon he was in two minds whether to send and ask her if she would care to come out and see Montreal, or whether to leave her severely alone. In the end he chose the latter course, thinking that if she did not want to come, it saved him from the

refusal ; and if she did it might prove a little wholesome punishment for her behaviour in the morning. And again he smiled to himself. He hoped she would have liked to come, because it pleased him to think of punishing her, and gave him an odd glow of possession, unlike anything he had quite experienced before. Then, with his old habit of self-analysis, he wondered why he should take the trouble to care either way.

As he wandered round Montreal, admiring with a casual eye the exceeding beauty of the autumn tint, his brain still harked back, whether he would or no, to the problem of the unfamiliarity of his state of mind. What, then, was it that gave it that unfamiliar trend ? Had no women ever occupied his thoughts before ? He tried to remember the faces he had found fair of old, and always there was a consciousness that the case had been different. The other women wanted him to admire them and to remember them. They had often wanted more than mere remembrance. He was too honest even to pretend that he had not known they would like to share with him that beautiful old Manor House, and the respectful village that hailed him lord and master. But they had left him cold. When the days of idle dalliance were over, he forgot with cruel ease. But never, at any time, had a woman flung scorn at him, tossed his generosity back into his face, and told him with bursting indignation that she hated him and would never set eyes on him again if she could help it. The mere recollection of it brought Kitt's face vividly to his mind, and again his pulses stirred quiveringly at the thought of her. Neither was it merely the attraction of the unobtainable ; or the novelty of the unaccustomed scorn. Behind it all lay something else—the something that so baffled and teased him.

For through every pore of Kitt's vigorous personality shone her truth and steadfastness. Unreasonable and undisciplined she might be, childish, contradictory, exasperating ; but, behind all, was there not the very germ and essence of a gloriously attractive woman ? Norman would have been no true man if he had not seen

It, after his senses were once awakened. Some day, in a more developed stage, she might become more than beautiful. Already she gave every promise of a maturity that could only delight. And with it would be brain and originality, and fearless independence of heart and mind. Odd that he had not perceived anything of it on the ship! Yet, perhaps not so odd, considering that she had been only white and sad and silent, dwelling apart in her own little world of sorrow.

It was only when flint struck flint, and the sparks showed that he had gained any inkling of the real Kitt—the wildflower of the mountain and the moor that had lightheartedly grown up to invent her own theories of that Master-Knot we call Life. And then, because he had insight and sympathetic comprehension beneath his veneer of indifference, it was perfectly natural that his interest should be arrested, and that he should want to probe deeper. The feeling grew more and more as the afternoon wore on. Almost he wished he had tried to persuade her to come out with him. It would have been a pleasure to watch for more sparks, and perhaps head them off or encourage them, as the mood took him. . . . To watch the changing lights in her eyes! Were they really violet, or just ordinary blue-grey? . . . To see the red glow spread, and hover and die away, and come again! . . . To watch her mobile lips! . . . Norman was conscious again of that sudden swift glow in himself. How the very thought of her lips tantalised him! Unconsciously, he fell a-dreaming. How would he feel if one day she lifted them to him—raised her face to his with a hard-won and sweet surrender? He sprang up from the seat, placed specially for tourists to enjoy a lovely view of the city below—one tourist, at any rate, and probably not the first, scarcely conscious that a city was there, because of a woman's face that showed between. Was he going mad, he wondered? Was some phase of senile decay attacking him—him the lordly young squire? Pshaw! It was ridiculous to dream in that sentimental fashion! Had he not always hated sentimentality, the banal refuge of weak minds? He would go back to the hotel

and grapple with this thing. If she chose to show herself at dinner, well and good ! If she did not choose, well and good also !

At the hotel he asked no questions concerning her, but dressed with special care, and descended to the dining-room the very epitome of the well-groomed, unobtrusive, distinguished-looking Englishman. At his small table a place was laid for one only. Then she was not coming. She intended to sulk in her own room through the evening as she had sulked through the afternoon. Well ! he would see her in the morning, and in the meantime he must school himself to wait with his old cool cynicism. He knew he was disappointed ; but he told himself it was only because he had expected to get a little more of the humorous aspect out of her unwilling companionship, and it seemed a thousand pities such an opportunity should be wasted.

Nevertheless, in the private sitting-room he had taken especially for their interview, he wandered restlessly around after dinner was over. How everything seemed to speak of her ! The whole room was redolent of her fine, fearless scorn, her young unreasonableness. How whole-hearted she was in her moods ! No half-measures for such as she. "When we are not indifferent, we Irish folk, we either love or hate—and I hate you." He heard her clear young voice declaiming its verdict—"and I hate you." His restlessness increased. How odiously empty the room seemed now ! Better her hate, declaimed aloud, than her absence and this sense of emptiness. Could he perhaps lure her down from her stronghold—with a threat of a fright if necessary—anything so that she came ? But his baffled mind formed no stratagem for the moment, and his thoughts ran on. If her hate was whole-hearted, what would her love be ? How many women, of those he had known, alone and miserable in a strange hotel in a distant land, would have refused his companionship and escort ? He would have taken her to a theatre gladly—done anything she wished to entertain her—and she would not even condescend to dine at his table. Of a truth her hate was so far whole-hearted enough. Slowly his

admiration grew. No analysis of motives or reason was needed to say if she was deserving of admiration or otherwise. The main point was that she appealed to him, that she pleased his fastidious taste: nothing else was of any importance at all. Then, why stay idly there, and do nothing to relieve the tedium of the long evening? He wanted to talk to her, so of course she must come down—if not with willingness, then she must be inveigled by stratagem. Finally, he sat down and wrote her a little note. Of course, it was an absurd proceeding, to write to one's own wife in the same hotel; but, after all, it was a long way from England, and probably the page boy would not trouble his head overmuch. In answer to his ring, the door opened, and the hall porter stood waiting. Norman picked up a book, into which he had slipped the note.

"Will you ask the chambermaid to give this book to madam if she is not asleep. I do not want her to be disturbed if she is."

The hall porter stared at him in some perplexity.

"Madam has gone," he answered.

For once in his life Norman was thrown completely off his guard. "Gone! How do you mean *gone*? Where has she gone?"

"Madam left the hotel during dinner-time this evening, and went away by the eight o'clock train. I carried her baggage to the station myself."

Norman thrust his hands deep into his pockets and bit his lip. He felt that if he were not very careful he would make a fool of himself. With iron determination he controlled his voice.

"I thought she had decided not to go to-night, but I suppose she changed her mind. I wish I had known. Er—er—the eight o'clock train only goes as far as Hove, does it?"

"That's all, sir. I told madam, and she said it suited her better. I understood her to say she was a bad traveller, and should take two or three days over her journey, instead of going right through on one train."

"Yes, that was our intention. I shan't want any-

thing more to-night. I shall take the express myself in the morning."

The man withdrew, and Norman found himself alone.

And it was as though a wizard waved his wand and slowly Norman Lutterworth, the man of yesterday, passed away for ever.

For in that moment he knew.

He knew, without any need to probe further, that he loved this wilful slip of an Irish girl with all the pent-up forces of his life.

Presently he strode to the window and threw it open, conscious of a swift desire for fresh air and wide spaces. The thing was so big, coming upon him thus unexpectedly, that it gave him a sense of suffocation. He wanted the whole wide world to breathe in.

And all the time, though she had run away from him, there was a growing exultation. He knew that the miracle had happened for him. He knew that life had given him the glory of the Supreme Desire. For his monotonous ease, his empty longing, his idle dreaming—she had given him an aim; she had set his willing feet upon the thorny path of a great quest.

Kitt had run away to hide from him, but somehow he would find her. Somehow, somewhere, no matter what the odds against him, he would seek her and win her, and hold her for ever.

The stars glistened down with friendly eyes from the lovely autumn night—for they love the big things and the big realities. And Love and Hate are of these; especially the strong love of a strong man bending all its mighty force to annihilate the hate of the woman who has suddenly filled his life.

Standing there in the starlight, Norman marvelled in a quiet way at his own intensity. He had not suspected that when roused he would be roused so overwhelmingly as this. He felt his heart was ice when he remembered Hester Strange. He knew instinctively that nothing except Kitt herself could come between him and his quest. If she scorned him to the last and ran from him, he would own himself beaten and a failure; but not for anyone else would he let her go

while they were free man and free woman. He stood quite still for a period which might have been long or short. He lost all thought of time.

Then finally a deep tenderness transformed his whole face. "You little wild, foolish girl," ran his longing thought, "frightened out of your life alone in some strange wilderness town, rather than remain under the same roof with me! But some day it will be different. It must, it *shall* be different. When at last I win you to my arms, you will never want to leave their shelter again."

CHAPTER VIII.

KITTY HAS A SURPRISE.

WHEN Kitty found herself alone in the big station, she felt as if she had strayed into some prehistoric land, where prehistoric mammals still roamed.

In the glare of the electric light, with its black shadows and mysterious gloomy corners, the huge Canadian Pacific locomotives looked weird and dreadful to her weary eyes. Even the people about her seemed strange and unfamiliar, and nothing but the remains of a dauntless courage kept her from returning in haste to the hotel. Come what would, she was determined not to face Norman, nor endure his protection again. She would show him that she was perfectly well able to take care of herself and arrange her own plans.

So, as a preliminary, she was taking a train to Hove, which was a perfectly senseless and useless step with but one advantage—that Hove was in the direction of Kneller!

She merely gave herself the discomfort of a long, weary night on a slow train, and would not arrive at Kneller any sooner than if she had stayed comfortably in Montreal for the Westbound express. However, she had the satisfaction of running away from Norman, and that upheld her spirit. At the same time, it was only upheld by a great effort when she saw the long car in which she was to sleep, and the strange, uncanny arrangement of shelf-like bunks upon which the passengers had to contrive to undress and lie down as best they could. She was given a lower bunk at first, as ladies

usually prefer them, but the apparition of a man's legs dangling from the shelf above so alarmed her that she decided she would rather be on the top. Accordingly, the black attendant found an upper berth for her, and helped her to climb into it.

Then remained the problem of getting her clothes off while sitting on the bunk, for there was no space to stand upright. Perhaps one was not supposed to undress at all. In some trepidation she peeped through her curtains to see what others were doing, and beheld passengers of both sexes in various stages of undress, passing and repassing along the car. Then she glanced up and encountered the interested, somewhat pointed, gaze of a man likewise peeping through his curtains directly opposite to her. This was the last straw, and she hastily withdrew to her own private shelf, and busied herself closing every possible crevice in the curtains with safety pins.

Then followed an interminable, wretched night. The train jolted and snorted and clanged its way through the dreary hours, while a man on the shelf next to her, kept up a running, continuous accompaniment of stentorian snores.

Towards morning, the train came to a standstill, and judging by the anxious queries on every side something had gone wrong. It transpired that a freight train was off the line ahead, and they were likely to remain where they were for some hours. But with the daylight her spirits revived a little, and she was glad to climb down from her eyrie and go out into the fresh morning air.

The attendant, who had evidently been waiting to help her down, hurried forward; but she loftily waved him aside, partly with her foot, and swung herself to the ground. She saw him scowl, but was so far invigorated by the morning freshness that she only tossed her head and clambered out of the car, down on to the track. Then came breakfast, and she was able to feel a little interest in her fellow-travellers. They all seemed pleasant and friendly with each other, and even the "snorer" of the long night hours was a companion-

able person by day. Yet, after three hours, how utterly tedious it grew! Nothing around them but pathless forests; nothing before and behind but the curving track; nothing to do but sit still and wait until the line was cleared. Sitting at luncheon she told her *vis-à-vis*, in answer to his query, that she was going to Kneller.

"Why! you ought to have been in the Western Express," he explained. "Who in the world allowed you to come by this train?"

Kitt coloured up, and remarked that she hated a very long journey, and preferred to break it at Hove.

"Well, we shan't get in much before the express now, and, anyhow, it's a poor place to stay in. If you are wise you will merely change trains."

Kitt went back to her seat to reflect, feeling once again utterly miserable. Beyond any question Norman would be on the express, on his way to his hunting expedition. It had been her intention to let him pass her on the journey, and travel to her own destination later; but her experiences so far had not encouraged any desire to loiter by the way, and she would have much preferred to hurry on to Kneller. But if she tamely got into the express at Hove, and he found her there, she would not have gained anything but a night of perfectly unnecessary discomfort.

No. He must not have the chance to have the laugh of her. However uncomfortable Hove might prove, she must at any rate endure it for one night and take the express on the morrow. Thus she would avoid meeting him again, for it was not in the least likely he would know she was at Hove or seek her there if he did. A message on the morrow to her aunt at Kneller, would be soon enough to let them know she was arriving, and if an explanation was necessary she would give it later. So she avoided anyone likely to ask her questions, and braced herself for another uncomfortable experience. Not unnaturally her resentment against Norman continued to grow, for, after all, he was at the root of the unnecessary worries that now

harassed her. Arrived finally at Hove, she went to the hotel and asked for a room, bravely hiding her inner trepidation under an appearance of quiet hauteur. Yet, as she stood alone in the bare little apartment of the frame-house, her courage was sorely tried. How hideous it all was! The ugly corrugated-iron build-up, the dreadful commonplaceness, the sense of a new place not yet ready for habitation. Was it possible that her whole period of exile was to be spent in a similar place? Did this unknown aunt, a young sister of her father's, who had emigrated to Canada many years ago, live in a frame-house, in an unfinished street, in an unfinished backwoods town? In her present mood even the glory of the autumn maples failed to please. The colours seemed to her crude and harsh, lacking inevitably the tender outlines and exquisite softness of her beloved Donegal. She thought of the little clustering white-washed dwellings along the mountain slopes on the north shore of the Bay; of the strangely-indented coast with its long arms and fretwork of channels; of the sweet, mist-laden moors—and all her soul was heavy with longing.

But to give way to home-sickness now might seriously undermine her remnants of courage, so she turned her thoughts resolutely to the glad day when she should go back, and when Pat, with his lazy smile should be waiting to welcome her. Did he dream of her every day as she of him, comforting himself with the promise of what next year might bring.

The loud clanging of an engine bell aroused her, and glancing from her window she saw people hastening towards the little station. Evidently the express was just arriving.

She sat down to wait until it should steam away, and it amused her a little to think of Norman seated in his car so close to her, little dreaming that she was there. Then, at last, the clanging began again, and she stood up to watch the huge locomotive crawl puffing and snorting on its journey. When the last vestige of smoke had vanished she gave a little sigh of relief. No need to make any more plans to hide! On

its long-west-bound journey the express had taken Norman out of her life, and all the worry and annoyance since they landed at Montreal might very well be forgotten as a bad dream. To-morrow, or the day after, she would reach Kneller and make the acquaintance of the Colonial relatives, whom her father had specially wished her to visit for a few months. Feeling a little reassured, she set about making some sort of a toilet for dinner, unearthing from her hold-all a simple black silk blouse which was cut low at the throat and finished with little Irish lace collar and cuffs, the whole made for her by an adoring dressmaker in the home village. She buried her nose in it a moment, for her keen sense of longing detected the smell of peat from the dressmaker's cottage fire. Then she smoothed the unruly waves of her hair into some pretence of neatness, and waited in readiness for the dinner bell. It sounded ; and feeling horribly lonely she went out into the passage in search of the dining-room.

In the hall a youth, whose only pretence at livery was a cap with the name of the hotel on it, directed her to a door a little ajar. She pushed it open, hoping the hotel was quite empty on that particular night. As a matter of fact, it contained only one other visitor. He was standing at a small table laid for two in the window and for the moment his back was turned to the door.

When Kitt saw him she started violently and caught her breath with a gulp, then stood transfixed. It was impossible to mistake the slim, well-groomed figure, the clear-cut profile with its finely-moulded chin, the distinguished air of the man whose ancestors had been lords of the soil and of many serfs for generations.

Then suddenly Norman turned and saw her, standing there in a hesitating manner, as if about to turn and fly, while all her face glowed with resentment.

He gave her a moment to pull herself together, and then came forward in the most casual fashion, as he might have done on the ship,

"I knew I should find you here," he said. "That's why I came."

She was speechless with vexation, and the red spot showed in her cheeks.

"Don't be angrier than you can help," he went on cheerfully. "Of course, I know you never meant to set eyes on me again if you could help it, and you ran away last night on purpose to avoid me, but there were reasons why I felt bound to follow you. Come in and sit down. I promise you I won't be more objectionable than I can help."

His keen gaze, though he spoke lightly, was reading every line of her face. He saw the tell-tale swellings about her eyes that spoke of tears and wakeful hours; the nervous movement of her lips that suggested she was suffering from nerve-exhaustion; the restlessness of the slim, brown hands. He looked hard into her averted eyes, grey now with tiredness, and in all her bearing he read passionate resentment of himself. But because he was prepared for that, he was not repulsed.

Rather did he feel the more drawn to her. The wizard's wand still waved. Some one in himself he had never met before, and never suspected, pushed his way steadily uppermost. He knew that to this new self, no freshness and bloom of gaiety and colouring at that moment could have seemed more dear than the heavy-swollen lids, the obstinate, proud little mouth that tried so hard not to tremble, the tired, grey, averted eyes. Obviously she had had a wretched time. Obviously, also, no amount of discomfort would turn her from a fixed purpose she held dear.

"Why did you come?" she said at last, in a low, vexed voice, still refusing to look at him. "You had no right to follow me."

"I think I had. Circumstances neither of us could control, leading to a great deal of annoyance, gave me a sort of right to look after you until you were safely at your journey's end."

"I am perfectly well able to look after myself."

"Yes, I think you are; but that is not quite the point. As I explained to you before, some unforeseen unpleasantness might have arisen through these circumstances we could not control. Also, you are rather

fresh to travel to be wandering about Canada alone. Whether you agree or not, I consider I have a certain right to take care of you until you reach Kneller; and at the risk of making you hate me still more, I am here to act upon my right. Anyhow, will you bear with me during dinner, as I have taken the liberty of ordering a special one—the best I could procure in this forsaken spot—that I thought might tempt you."

Kitt moved slowly across the room and sat down, because she did not feel equal to planning any other move at the moment; but she had not the smallest intention of showing any gratitude for his unsought and undesired solicitude, nor of pretending to any friendliness over the meal. Norman was not greatly perturbed at that. He had gained one point, at any rate: she was going to sit at dinner with him and he would have the opportunity he had so desired last night, of watching her face.

At first he attempted a little conversation, but her monosyllabic answers made it almost impossible to keep on, and he had to fall back on desultory remarks just to break the silence. But in the meantime there was nothing to prevent him studying her, and, with covert eyes, he took all the joy he could.

After dinner, guessing that she would at once retire to her room, he made a bold move.

"I can see you are still furious with me, but there is no need to punish yourself by sitting in a stuffy little bedroom all through this lovely evening. If you care to go for a stroll, I will either go in the opposite direction or I will come with you, if I may, and promise to efface myself."

Kitt glanced outside and saw that the evening was indeed lovely, and the recollection of her stuffy little bedroom did not in any degree lessen its allurements. She longed to go out, but her pride was reluctant to permit her.

"Don't get more tired still in making up your mind," he said. "I'll go another way if you prefer it. Or we can pretend we are on the ship, if you like. It

was easy enough there to be companions, yet blissfully indifferent to each other's presence."

"The ship would be best," she agreed slowly, "and let it last over to-morrow. You certainly were under no misapprehension about any need to look after my welfare then."

He took the thrust good-humouredly. It meant so much now to be with her at all. She might aim a thousand darts so long as she stayed where he could see her.

"At least, there was not the same need," he replied pointedly. "No unforeseen circumstance had inextricably entangled our lives."

"It has not now." The fascinating mouth grew more obstinate. "You have made a perfectly absurd fuss about it all along. I intend to forget that it ever happened."

He was silent a moment, gazing abstractedly out of the window. Then he turned to her with something dangerously like a twinkle in his eyes, and had a thrust in his turn.

"All the same, it's rather odd, isn't it, to think that you can never be quite sure you will not run up against some one who will call you Mrs. Lutterworth in the perfectly natural belief that you are my wife."

"I can promise you he will be very quickly undeceived," she flung back, and marched away to put on her hat.

But left to himself, the twinkle only grew in Norman's eyes. She was really rather delightful when she hurled darts at him. For the rest, he easily perceived that he must play a waiting game. And, not a little to his own surprise, Norman found himself falling quite naturally into the rôle of the man who knows how to wait. Which proved perhaps, more than anything else, that underneath a guise almost of inanity there had existed the character of a strong man.

For it is the man or woman who can *wait*, who can patiently reserve forces in seeming idleness, who can look beyond the little things of the present to the big things of the future, who can learn to move along slowly

and steadily instead of starting off at a pace that cannot be kept up—it is that man or woman who passes the winning-post in calm assurance later on, or, as the American so comprehensively expresses it, “gets there.”

Norman did not stop to analyse this new-found strength of his. He only knew that where Kitt Fitzgerald was concerned he meant, by hook or by crook, by patience or by action, to “get there.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE SUPREME DESIRE.

THE walk could hardly be called a success. Kitt was cross, and tired, and brimful of resentment. She only went because a walk was a little less undesirable than an evening in a stuffy bedroom. Norman made no special effort to carry on a conversation. Obviously, she did not want to talk to him, and little was to be gained by pressing her. As they drew near the hotel on their return, he told her he hoped she would not miss another night's rest, as she looked badly in need of one, and suggested that she gave orders not to be called in the morning in case she was sleeping.

"There will be no train we can take until the express comes through in the evening, so why not have a real good rest?" he finished.

"I am not sure that I shall go on to-morrow"—obstinately. "But I hope you will not let my arrangements in any way affect yours."

"I can hardly promise that, but I will travel in the smoking-car if you prefer it. I'm afraid I am quite determined to see you safely to Kneller. You see," he added cheerfully, entirely ignoring her frown, "it appears to be a particularly outlandish sort of place scarcely anyone has heard of, and if I hadn't seen it in the timetable I should doubt its existence. However, it *is* alluded to there as a place where trains stop at given times, so I suppose it does exist somewhere. Do you happen to know anything about it, or why, of all places in the world, you are going there?"

"If it will ease your curiosity"—cuttingly—"I am going to spend some months with my father's

sister, who lives there; and after that——” She paused.

“After that?” . . . He tried not to appear unduly interested.

Her face softened strangely. “After that I shall go back to Donegal, and—Pat.”

“Is Pat a brother?” A twinge of jealousy shook him, but he only showed a polite interest.

“No.” A dreaminess came into her eyes, and she looked into the distance without seeing anything—anything, that is, except the shadow of her dream. Norman stood still and watched her. When her eyes and face softened like that his head reeled a little. Her look told him volumes. He had seen for himself how whole-hearted she could be in her anger and hate. He saw visions of what she might be in her love.

He looked away suddenly with studied unconcern.

“Are you engaged to Pat?”

“N—no.”

He waited, hoping she would say more, but evidently she had no intention of admitting him to her friendship in any degree whatsoever. But, at least, she was not engaged to Pat, and Pat was far away. No quixotic claim need hinder him on that score. He felt bolder again.

“And when you go back to Donegal and—and—Pat, do you expect to spend the rest of your days there?”

“I can think of nothing on earth that I should like better,” she answered with slow, unwavering emphasis.

“It seems a pretty simple wish, so no doubt you will get it. But I wouldn’t let myself build on it too much. Places sometimes shrink and change so when one travels abroad. After this year it may prove far less sufficing than when you last saw it.”

Again, as on the ship, she looked at him with a kind of pity in her young security. “Change!” How her very tones scorned the absurdity of his suggestion. Then she turned away as if it were really not worth while defending the point. “Good-night,” she said in a cold, even voice, and took her candle and passed upstairs

without a backward glance. Norman watched her until she disappeared, all unknowing that his new-found soul shone in his eyes. Then he went out again into the night.

Next day Kitt did not appear at all until lunch-time, and then she was colder and more difficult than ever. She had had time to nurse her resentment at being followed, and did not scruple to let him feel it. If he were offended so much the better. Perhaps he would have the goodness to go off after his moose and leave her to her own devices. But after what had already passed Norman was not very likely to be put off now, and as long as he might watch her he felt he could possess his soul in patience indefinitely. Only once he aimed a thrust in retaliation of a few curt darts hurled at him.

It chanced that a commercial traveller who had been staying at the Westminster Hotel at the time of the fire had come in on the night train. In the smoke-room he engaged Norman in conversation.

"A nasty accident," he said, referring to the over-turned lamp. "Lucky for every one the Westminster Hotel fire installation is so well up-to-date. I've heard of a whole town being burnt out from one over-turned lamp."

Norman pulled silently at his pipe.

"I'm afraid the lady had a bad shock. Is she quite recovered?"

"The lady?" a little wonderingly.

"Your wife, sir—I have not the pleasure of knowing your name."

"My name is Lutterworth," curtly. "Oh, yes, thanks, the lady is quite recovered. We are going on this afternoon."

"So am I, if I can get finished in time. I hope I shall see you and Mrs. Lutterworth aboard the train."

It was over their tea that Norman allowed himself the pleasure of his thrust. He remarked, with startling suddenness, "There's a man here who was at the Westminster Hotel. He asked me how my wife was, and hoped she had recovered from her shock." He saw

Kitt bite her lip with vexation, though she coldly continued her tea without making any comment.

"That wasn't all," he added tantalisingly.

"I've no particular wish to hear the rest."

"Still, it is rather interesting. When he heard we were going on by the train this evening, he said he was also, and he hoped he should see Mrs. Lutterworth and me aboard."

Still she refused to be drawn.

"Rather odd if he should have business in Kneller! You might have to account for a vanished husband."

"As I have told you all along, the true explanation will easily account for everything. If this man gives me the opportunity, I will tell him on the train." She gave him a sudden, swift look. "I dislike intensely your way of allowing these things to pass."

"It is the only way feasible at the moment, except the solution I put before you."

"And I say it is not. If only some of these people would come to me, instead of you, I would smooth out the tangle once for all."

"I'm afraid you can never quite do that. There will still be many who never come in contact with your explanation."

"They do not matter. The world is a big place. Why"—and her voice trembled a little—"why do you go out of your way to annoy me more than you need? I feel I shall have no peace until you are out of my life for good and all."

He leaned towards her suddenly, and the unexpected earnestness in his face, coupled with its swift softness, almost took her breath away. "That is where you are wrong, Kathleen. You will have no peace until I am in your life—for good and all."

She stared at him like an astonished child. Surely the man had taken leave of his senses. But instead of following up his mood, he pushed his chair away and shrugged his shoulders with assumed lightness.

"No, I haven't taken leave of my senses. Your expression asks that question as plainly as words. I merely state a fact; but as it isn't one that interests

you much—at present”—with a slight emphasis—“we won’t dwell on it . . . Are your things ready, because we might be starting for the station? I hope that confounded traveller won’t be on the train, because he has cheek enough to ask me straight out to introduce him, and I’m hanged if I should know what to call you.”

“It’s perfectly simple. I am Miss Fitzgerald.”

“Well, for heaven’s sake don’t tell him so. The man’s a positive gasbag, and you don’t know where his tongue mightn’t wag.” Exasperated beyond himself, he turned upon her suddenly. “Do you want the tale of the fire to go across Canada, coupled with the fact that a lady named Miss Fitzgerald was in my room—or I in hers?”

She was stung by his brutality.

“I don’t care how it goes, so the wretched business is ended by you and me never meeting again,” and sudden tears shone in her eyes.

Instantly he was all penitence. “I’m a brute,” he said; “but sometimes the situation gets beyond me, and I hardly know what I am saying. Surely, you know I would shout the truth abroad to the ends of the earth if I believed that would help matters. But would it? People are such fools and busybodies. I just feel that I daren’t trust the world with the truth. Half our lives we have to hoodwink some one for the sake of a little peace, and it’s for the sake of the peace of your whole life I feel we’ve got to hoodwink the world now. If you’d only trust me——”

“I’d sooner trust to the truth. It’s the way I’m made. I’m not in the least afraid of the fools and busybodies.”

“That’s because you know nothing of the world outside Donegal,” with a little despairing gesture. “Anyhow, try to believe that I have acted for the best. If I was wrong—I suppose time will show. In the meantime, I must tell you again that I consider I have a special right to guard your welfare as far as I am able, and I intend to try and do so.”

“And I say I do not need guarding. The only thing

necessary now is that you should go your way and I mine, and both of us forget."

"It is a point on which we can only agree to differ. For your own sake I hope you are right. But if you are wrong, and the need arises, I shall be somewhere within call. You may be perfectly certain of that."

Then he turned away and left her standing alone, while he busied himself with the baggage. Once only, when he saw her fumbling with her purse, he spoke again. "There is no need to do any more tipping. I have done it all—as my right."

She flashed defiance at him, but as before, his force of will quelled her, and she could only look away, feeling herself beaten. On the train he took charge of all arrangements in the most matter-of-fact manner, and though she hated to acknowledge it even to herself, the sensation of being cared for and protected, was far preferable to her lonely experience of the former journey. When her bunk was ready for her, he conducted her to it himself and pulled the curtains.

"You can go to sleep quite peacefully," he said simply. "I have the bunk opposite and there will be nothing to be anxious about. If you want anything, say my name. I shall be certain to hear."

Why he should be so sure of hearing Kitt did not stop to enquire. Thoroughly tired out, she let her resentment sleep for a time, and crept into her bunk soothed by the knowledge that she was in the care of a man blessed with that bearing which ensures respect everywhere, and open-handed enough to receive always the highest attention.

And the man himself, but a few feet away in the same car—for such is the arrangement of Canadian trains—lay on his bunk with his eyes wide open, watching the stars sink to their setting and the interminable trees fly past. For that night, at any rate, she was in his care, close beside him almost where he could put out his hand and touch her. The mere thought of it thrilled him; he longed to peep through her curtains to make

quite sure. But he could see the curtains, and hear her low, regular breathing, and that had to be enough.

Some day——

No, he dare not think of that yet. It might shake his patience to its foundations, and well he perceived that only patience would help him in his quest. So he turned his eyes again to the stars, and thanked the Power behind the heavens that into the inanity and banality of his life, into the dreary indifference and empty pomp, the puerile self-satisfaction, self-esteem, and self-pleasing, had come at last that sharp stab his soul had vaguely conceived to be the one thing that could sweep aside the emptiness, and in stabbing him awake, might give him also the priceless gift—the glory of the Supreme Desire. For one man that glory might be embodied in the search for either North or South Pole; for another, it might be the last word in prowess at some favourite game; for another, some long-dreamed invention; for another, some coveted honour, some lofty seat. What matter, so the Desire was there—the goal, the end, the aim, the ambition—to make, and keep, life *real*—to keep the soul alive—and thus save from that dreadly atrophy which overtakes and holds so many?

Powerless to avert it, Norman had felt this atrophy coming down upon him before he had reached his best years; the fatal introspective habit that asks cynically of all things “What is the use?” and envelops both endeavour and desire in its deadly folds.

And then, suddenly from nowhere, had come the blinding light. The gods had been good to him in time. For better, or worse, he had his quest now; though it was but the winning and guarding and holding of one little obstinate Irish girl, who might so easily upset the peace of her whole life through very honesty. Well, other men might look for Poles and dare the deadly white wastes; might write their names on the scroll of glory in this way or that; might break their hearts writing a poem, or a book, or a musical composition, above the understanding of a dull, callous world. For him it was enough that out of the waste Love had drawn

near and beckoned, giving him withal the clean joy of the chase, the eager, bewildering hope, the baffled desire, that alone could achieve the final glory of his conception.

And if in the end he lost, he was visionary enough to perceive that even the loss was worth while. That anything, everything, is worth while, even a crime, if it eradicate from life the deadly morphia of surfeited inanity and numbed desire.

CHAPTER X.

THE "DRUMMER" BLUNDERS.

ALL the next morning Norman remained in the smoking-car, reading the magazines and newspapers. For one thing, he had no wish to inflict himself upon Kitt again until she had grown thoroughly sick of her own company ; and for another, the commercial traveller proved to be in the train, having scrambled in at the last moment. If he could help it he did not intend to let him encounter Kitt, so he allowed himself to be victimised as far as was necessary, and at the same time he endeavoured to suppress the man's inclination to friendliness by a marked frigidity.

But it takes more than a mere manner to suppress a "drummer" in Canada, and this particular one did not see anyone else he felt so disposed to talk to as the "English swell." So he paid little heed to Norman's laconic comments to his flow of information, and incidentally told him how to make a "pile" in a few weeks "out west" if he happened to have any capital at command ; what was going to happen to the British Empire in the course of a year or so ; why Germany would have to stop increasing her fleet ; and gave him an interesting survey of the future movements of the Colonies of the Empire.

"You seem to be an extraordinarily well-informed man," Norman told him at last. "I wonder if you happen to have timed when the next earthquake is due in the West Indies, because I've a sugar plantation over there I've never seen, and I rather thought of visiting it."

"Go next year," was the prompt reply. "There's

lots of things may be happening out there presently, and if you've seen the place you'll know where you are when you're reading about 'em."

"Thank you. I'll remember your advice."

"Moreover, it will be the last steamer trip, likely enough. The next time you'll have to go by aeroplane. I figure out there's two more years for wheels and steam. Then it's going to be planes and air." The traveller went into some absolute calculations to which Norman paid no attention, and then he was suddenly startled by the remark: "I reckon the lady's getting a bit tired of her own company by now. Maybe she'd like to come along for a yarn. They can come in here, you know, if they don't mind smoke."

Norman stared at him a moment, and then pulled himself together. "She has a headache," he said coldly, "and prefers to remain quiet. A long journey tires her very much."

"Just so. The same with my wife. Train-sick she gets—for all the world as if she was on the briny." He got up. "I think I'll stretch my legs a bit." And to Norman's relief he lurched away, walking with difficulty as the train swung round a curve. But as it happened, Kitt also thought she would move about a little to relieve the tedium of sitting, and the boredom of the endless forest of stunted trees, through which they travelled; and unfortunately she encountered the ubiquitous "drummer," just when another curve caused him to lurch almost on to the top of her.

"Beg pardon!" he exclaimed, and then suddenly his face lit up. "Good mornin', Mrs. Lutterworth. I was just speaking about you. If you're looking for your husband, he's in the smoking-car. We've been having a great jaw. I wanted him to fetch you, as I thought you might like to join in, but he said you were train-sick. My wife's the same. Sick as a dog all the bloomin' journey."

Kitt stared at him in blank amazement, and for a moment her tongue was petrified. Then she remembered who he probably was; and her fierce resolve to explain things; and made a desperate plunge. "I am not

train-sick. He had no right to say it. I was never sick in a train in my life. And I wish to tell you also that I am not——"

"That's all right, my dear. Of course, I know we don't talk about it openly, and I oughtn't to have said it; but, there, I'm an old married man, and I'm so used to it in Maria, I was sort of careless."

"I'm not talking about the sickness. I don't care about that either way. I only want to tell you——" There was a suggestion of tears in her voice, and he interposed hastily.

"I understand—I've monopolised your husband too long. I'm the sinner. I'm very sorry. But I wanted him to fetch you. You see, I knew just what Maria would feel about it. She'd have let me know it all right if I'd left her alone all morning. Ah! here he is coming now. But you needn't blame him, it was really my fault——"

Speechless with fury, Kitt felt, rather than saw, Norman's presence; but at the parting shaft, she could no longer keep the angry tears from her eyes.

"The little lady was just coming to look for you," said the blunderer, "and I'm afraid I've put my foot into it by mentioning the train-sickness; but there, I'm like that—always saying the wrong thing. And Maria's so different. She likes every one to know it when she's bad. But I meant no harm. You must forgive me, Mrs. Lutterworth, and come and have a chat with me and your husband by and by."

To keep his face in view of Kitt's bursting wrath and the man's hopeless blundering was altogether beyond Norman, and he could not for the life of him help laughing. Whereupon Kitt turned upon him instantly and the traveller made a discreet exit.

"It's no laughing matter!" she exclaimed chokingly, with the tears still in her voice and her eyes glistening. "I—I—only wanted to t—tell him that I'm n—not Mrs. L—Lutterworth—and he wouldn't listen. He's an idiot—I—I—hate you both!—as if I minded anyone knowing if I was train-sick!"

A little private saloon, not in use, stood open near

them, and Norman drew her in, while he shook inwardly with laughter.

"My dear little girl, there's nothing to be upset about. Of course the man's an idiot; anybody can see that. You ought to have heard him re-creating the entire universe on a better plan to me this morning."

"That has nothing to do with it. I don't care what he says to you. But he's quite persuaded that I'm your wife, and I'm not, and I never will be; and he *must* be told. I was trying to tell him, and he was so stupid, he wouldn't let me finish. You must go after him, and tell him at once."

"No," decidedly. "I've made my decision, and I must stand by it. Telling of that sort must come from you. Shall I fetch him back?" and he made a movement towards the door.

"N—no," murmured Kitt, hesitatingly. The mere thought of the man coming back and making further blunders unnerved her. For the first time she began to see that her simple plan of telling the truth had difficulties. How puzzled he would be, and what questions he might ask! No, she could not face it now. Things must be left as they were until the end of the journey. But all her heart was sore against Norman, and she had to vent some of her wrath upon him. "You ought to have told him yourself this morning, instead of just sitting still and listening to him. I think it is monstrous, the way you leave me in a false position and do nothing."

"From my point of view I am trying to save you from a worse false position. Besides"—a veiled twinkle returned to his eyes—"he did not give me a chance. He insisted upon doing all the talking, and when he finally dragged you into the conversation, he immediately jumped to the conclusion that you were train-sick like—like—Maria."

But Kitt would not be soothed.

"I—I—*hate* Maria. I hate you all!"

Norman could not help laughing again, and her eyes grew very steely.

"It *must* finish to-day," she declared. "Surely

you can observe my wish that far. You talked finely about reparation . . ." she was very scornful. " Didn't it mean anything? "

Instantly he was grave.

" I shall observe your wish in every way as far as I can. We reach Kneller soon after four o'clock. Since you desire it so eagerly I won't stop at all this time," with a slight emphasis on the last two words. " You can introduce me to your aunt or not, as you like ; she need only know that I looked after you a little on the train. I shall go straight on to my hunting ground."

She looked thoroughly relieved, and just then the steward informed them that lunch was ready.

" Would you like to have it in here, alone? " he asked, and by her expression he saw that the idea pleased her. He went out and presently came back. " It is all right ; I have engaged this saloon to Kneller. You can stay here now until we arrive. The attendant is getting your things."

She thanked him coldly, and he went away to the dining-car, still chuckling inwardly at intervals at the recollection of the encounter he had interrupted and Kitt's speechless indignation. Then again he would become grave. After all was said and done, what a shame it was ! She had been entirely right when she asserted it was no laughing matter.

About an hour before they reached Kneller he went back to the little private saloon where she sat alone, watching the scenery of this vast new land. The long, monotonous miles of forest were broken now, and at intervals lovely views of Lake Superior were visible. In its vastness it looked like the sea—a wonderful inland sea, bordered by forests and creeks and inlets instead of by ocean sands. And sometimes in the distance it was brilliant turquoise, reflecting a turquoise sky, and sometimes softly shaded and shadowed where the clouds sailed over the blue. Sometimes an island, flaunting its autumn brilliancy of colouring, stood jauntily up in the wide waters of the lake ; and sometimes neither water nor islands nor cloud shadows were

visible when the train swept inland. In spite of her restless, perturbed state of mind, the vastness of the new land appealed to her, and she watched for the lake views with interest, though longing with a sense of deep loneliness for one of her own dear people to enjoy it with her.

Then Norman came back, and as he entered the saloon and closed the door behind him, she saw dimly for the first time that there was something in his eyes when they rested upon her that had not been there before the night of the disaster—something quite at variance with the self-centred indolence that had filled them on the voyage—something far different from their cold greyness when she had first encountered them. Yet there was no special change in his manner. He was still very much the cool, polite, unresponsive being of their early acquaintance.

"I thought you might like to know that our friend the 'Traveller' will not trouble you again. He got out of the train an hour ago, and he goes back to Montreal to-morrow. His beat does not extend further west."

She drummed on the window-sill with her fingers. Anyhow, she would soon reach the safe haven of Kneller, and then, surely, the entire list of incidents since they left the ship need never trouble her again.

"You will be arriving soon. I expect you are very glad."

He watched her keenly for some sign of relenting towards himself, but Kitt kept her eyes averted, and her mouth was uncompromisingly firm. He smiled the tiniest bit. "You look as if you never meant to forgive me—world without end, Amen."

"It is not a question of forgiveness. It was my fault as well as yours. All I want to do is to forget."

"And you think you will?"

"Yes."

"I wonder——"

She stared stonily out of the window and made no sign.

"I'm going to say an amazing thing to you before

we part." A fixed table stood at the side of the saloon near the window, and he half sat upon it, leaning towards her, so that he could see into her face. Her expression rather suggested that most of the things he said, and did, were amazing, more or less, and she was prepared for anything. The impulse to tease her was too irresistible, and with the flicker of a smile he asked in a winning voice: "Do you mind very much if I propose to you again?"

She compressed her lips a little. "It seems rather unnecessary," was all she vouchsafed him.

"It might not be so always, and it is the sort that will last." He watched her a moment, and then continued: "As a matter of fact, I have no right to propose to anyone, because I am engaged, after a fashion; but as it is only in view of a *mariage de convenance*—and circumstances often alter cases—I shall put an end to it next mail. My cousin, who happens to be the lady in question, will not mind in the very least, I think; although"—whimsically—"her mother will probably mind very much."

Kitt still evinced no particular interest, but it pleased him to go on, so he pretended not to notice. "Anyhow, I've a fancy to tell you a little about myself, before we part. I suppose you don't actively object?"

"I don't mind either way."

"Well, that is something; though, of course, according to all the canons of everyday life, you ought to be interested."

"Why?"

Her monosyllables always amused him. It was as though, in her resentment, she would not even waste a word on him.

"Oh, only because in everyday life it is natural for a young man of my possessions to be interesting to a young woman." There was nothing in the least arrogant or conceited in his manner. It was evident he was only giving rein to his whimsicality. But even his possessions failed to rouse Kitt. He might own the British Empire if he liked, so long as he left her Donegal. "I imagine, from your expression, that as

long as you, personally, own a few feet in Donegal, anyone else may own just what they please."

"I suppose so."

"Well, anyhow, I was only wanting to tell you a few things about myself; but as the worldly aspect does not interest you, we will leave that out. Of course, I quite understand, no other aspect does either, but I must follow my fancy." Again for a little while he watched her silently, until she grew a shade embarrassed and shot a defiant glance at him. "Forgive me," he said, "but you have such an amazing effect upon me, I hardly know how I am behaving. You make me feel a perfect stranger to myself. Of course, I've long been a curt, casual sort of chap, without much thought for anyone except Norman Lutterworth. But perhaps it wasn't altogether my fault. There seemed so little else really worth bothering about. I went to church on Sunday to please my mother, and for the same reason contemplated matrimony. When you happen to inherit possessions, it is usually thought expedient to hand them on in the direct line—though Heaven only knows why! they might often so easily go to a better line. I took the chair at occasional meetings and things—to please the villagers; and I built a new parish room—to please the bishop, who happens to be a sort of connection. I refrained from keeping a motor—to please the old stud-groom; and gave a few shooting parties—to please the head keeper. That is about the extent of how I took thought for others. For the rest, I pleased myself by considering only myself, and cultivating an attitude of fairly tolerant indifference to the world in general—an attitude exemplified, more or less, when I annexed the warmest, sunniest, corner on deck and resolutely monopolised it."

"Not entirely," said Kitt, in whom humour was apt to peep out at unexpected moments.

"I was coming to that," he twinkled appreciatively; "in fact, that is the culminating point."

She glanced at him with wondering eyes, a little interested in spite of herself.

"I mean *that* is the culminating point because you came in. I didn't want you, but you didn't care. It suited you to come ; so you came. In the same way, now, it suits you to go ; so you go. I count for nothing. Have not done from the first. In reality my self-pleasing is infinitesimal to yours."

She stared hard at the lake, not quite sure if he were scolding her or laughing at her. A shade of perplexity was in her face, which made her so alluring that he could not take his eyes away from her, or trust himself within reach. Suddenly he broke off. "Did any one ever tell you how pretty you are, Kathleen?"

She flushed resentfully and did not reply.

"Especially when you blush," he added.

She shot a disdainful glance at him, and then turned her face further away.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," he said softly. "I haven't much longer to look at you." Then: "Do you turn away when Pat tells you you are pretty?"

"Pat does not talk nonsense. I don't suppose he has ever noticed what I am like. It would not make any difference."

"Then I fear Pat is a dull fellow."

"He isn't. He can sail a boat most men would only go to the bottom in, and I've seen him get a right and left snipe more than once."

"Really?"—with a note of sarcasm.

"I'm sure he could teach you a good many things." She was stung into the retort.

Norman glanced away so that she might not see the smile in his eyes, for it was only the retort he wanted.

"Well, we mustn't quarrel any more, now we are going to part. I'm sure Pat is a paragon ; I expect you've been licking him into shape for years. And really it's myself I want to talk about. Not any one else at all, at all"—mimicking one of her little Irishisms. He turned to her again. "I think I had got to the culminating point, hadn't I?—which was when you invited yourself into my sunshine, and, all unwittingly, into my life, whether I would or no." He leaned forward, and all the secret charm that lurked in his

contradictory nature came to the fore. "Kathleen!—do you know?—have you guessed—that I love you?"

She shrank from him with a sudden, startled air. Then she seemed to pull herself together and gather up all her courage to meet him.

"Don't go back to what you said at the Montreal hotel. I told you nothing would induce me to marry you. It won't. Why need you talk of it again? Can't you leave me in peace? Isn't it enough that I hate you? Do, please, go away and leave me alone."

"I'm not asking you to marry me—at least, not at the moment. I think when I ask you that again, you'll say 'yes.' It will be a different asking next time. I'm only telling you just a simple fact. At least, it's rather a wonderful one really, but you wouldn't understand that in the way I do. All that matters just now is this: when I spoke of marriage in Montreal, it was from a sense of duty, and I hated the thought of it. When you scorned my offer, you took my breath away. You seemed suddenly to have become quite a different being. And afterwards I couldn't get you out of my mind at all. The night you ran away I had just planned a little scheme to lure you downstairs, because I wanted you so much. But I didn't know, until the hall-porter told me you had gone, how much I wanted you. Ever since then I've only wanted you more and more, and it doesn't make any difference that you are angry with me. I don't think you will be angry always. Anyhow, it isn't going to hurt you, while we are apart, to know that I love you, and that you have miraculously changed my whole life. There may come a moment when you will be glad of the knowledge. You are sending me away from you now much against my will. I want badly to stay and guard you from any unpleasantness that may result from those unfortunate circumstances at Montreal, but you have made up your mind that you won't have me. Well, I'll go away now and have my shooting trip; but presently I shall come back, and I shall come to Kneller to see how you are getting on, and if you need me. Or if there's any trouble or difficulty, you've only to send me a message,

and I shall come at once. I couldn't go away without trying to convince you of that. Do you understand?"

He waited for her to speak, and because she disliked the whole subject intensely, and felt that it was an insult to Pat, who was surely her one and only love, she got up and half turned away with that touch of high-handedness which he could not help admiring.

"There will be no trouble or difficulty when we are finally apart. It is only because you persist in following me that it happens. I don't want to think any more about it."

"Do you know," he commented, "I think you are almost curiously ungrateful?"

"Why should I be grateful?—especially after the line you took at Montreal. If I'm not like other girls, I can't help it. There have never been other girls in my life. And I haven't wanted them. No one in the world was happier than I, when I had my father and—and Pat—and the bay, and the moors. I think life is cruel—cruel—to take it all away at once, and leave me nothing at all. I wish I had died when my father did. It would have been better with him, there in the little churchyard, than in this dreadful country of strangers, where such wretched things can happen to one." Her voice grew stifled and she turned away to hide her streaming eyes.

Norman sat taut and still. Only by keeping an iron hold upon himself did he resist the longing to take her in his arms and try to comfort her. But he realised he would only make her very angry, and add to her unhappiness, at this stage, so he resolutely controlled himself.

"You'll try to believe I'm sorry about it, won't you?" he asked, and his voice was a shade less steady than usual, and very gentle.

"It won't help matters if I do. If you had not been there, it would never have happened."

"No. That's true. Still, we couldn't know that beforehand. But I don't think any harm is done so far, and I don't see that any need come of it now. You are right in trying to forget all about it. I hope you

will succeed. You will, if pluck counts for anything. You can't think how I've admired your pluck all through, and the way you've met a most difficult situation. I suppose Donegal taught you that, and your moors and mountains. Don't be more homesick than you can help. I hate to think of it: Time soon flies, and then you'll go back, and maybe you'll love it all better than ever. Perhaps, some day, you'll be able to forgive me enough to let me come and see it, too. And then we can laugh at all this tiresome business, and see only the humour of it." He leaned towards her, and added in a winsome voice: "Anyhow, you needn't be angry with me for loving you, need you? I can't very well help it. And I've done my best to undo the mischief I unwittingly caused."

He waited for her to speak, but she was too wretched to pay much heed to what he was saying, and only occupied herself fighting back the tell-tale tears, because it was evident that they must be nearly at Kneller.

He made one more effort. "We are nearly there. Are you going to say you have forgiven me before we part?"

She raised her head and looked out of the window with steady eyes. "What does it matter either way? I only want to forget."

"That can only mean I am unforgiven."

She made no reply. He turned to the window also, and his face grew a little grey.

"Very well. I must have patience. Anyhow, I have still my quest. I bless you for that!"

She did not understand, and did not try to. A few scattered dwellings told them Kneller was at hand, and she was conscious only of relief.

Five minutes later she stood on the platform beside her aunt, and gave no parting glance to the train that carried Norman away to his hunting.

CHAPTER XI.

MISS FORSYTH-HOPE.

KITT stood and looked out of her bedroom window, and she was conscious chiefly of a sense of disgust. So it was a little frame-house after all, in an ugly, straggly, unfinished, backwoods settlement, composed of one track worth calling a street, crossed by other tracks not worth calling anything, and a higgledy-piggledy assortment of other frame-houses, each a little uglier than the last. Several edifices, a shade higher than the surrounding houses, suggested a variety of places of worship, somewhat astounding considering the size of the place ; but that, she learnt later, was a common phenomenon in Canadian Settlements. Kitt had had very small conception of what she was coming to, but she had certainly expected something better than she had yet encountered. Her uncle was a rising official in the employ of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and in receipt of a high salary—so it seemed a little odd that he should be living in the backwoods.

She gathered that it was only for a year or two, while some re-organisation work was done, and was inclined to agree with her aunt when she bewailed the fact that it should happen to be just at the time Kitt had come to visit them.

"All the same," added Edith Hope, "there is an amusing side to backwoods life, for those who can see it, and time soon flies."

Kitt had taken to her aunt from the first moment. To the lonely, unhappy girl, she seemed very simple and direct, and just sympathetic enough without being

fussy—a refined and gentle woman living unscathed amid surroundings that might well have coarsened and vulgarised. She liked her uncle, too—a taciturn, silent man, who might be said to have written all over him, “deeds, not words.”

The only one of the household she did not like was a small girl of eight, who sauntered up the platform with the air of a bored empress, and, raising a nondescript dough-coloured face, with small, quizzical eyes, remarked coolly: “So I guess you’ve come.”

Kitt looked down at the apparition from her slender height, and said “Yes, I’ve come. Who are you?”

The sallow face flushed a shade.

“I’m Evelyn Mary Forsyth-Hope.” The child evidently scented an unresponsive attitude in the slim stranger, and resented it. For was she not a true Canadian, Canadian born, and therefore, of course, superior to any thin young woman with big, shadowy eyes from across the sea?

“What a grand sounding name! Are you a cousin?”

“I’m Evelyn, because mother reads Browning”—proudly—“and Mary because of her mother, and——” she hesitated.

“Forsyth is a little invention of her own,” put in her mother, with an amused expression; “she has a fancy for a double-barrelled name.”

The dough-coloured face grew pink. “I am a Forsyth-Hope,” she asserted defiantly, and flashed an angry glance at her mother.

“Very well. Have it as you like. Will you carry Kathleen’s umbrella home for her, Miss Forsyth-Hope?”

“You are laughing at me! I won’t be laughed at! Kathleen can carry her own umbrella,” and having dropped her air of boredom for one of offended dignity, she stalked off without another word.

Mrs. Hope and Kitt followed leisurely. Kitt felt a tingling to run after the child and box her ears, but her mother seemed quite unruffled. “It’s only her way,” she said. “She’s a thorough little Canadian. You see, she has to go to the Board School in a place like this—there is no other way of getting her

educated—and I'm afraid she picks up some rather queer manners."

Kitt secretly wondered how so nice a woman could possess so odious a child; but she only asked: "Why does she call herself Forsyth-Hope?"

"Oh, that's just a fad! Some new people have lately come to Kneller who are related to the Duke of Devon, and the two little girls evidently boasted about it in school. Another family quickly discovered they had an aristocratic great-grandfather and their children boasted about it also. Evelyn, or 'Chip,' as we always call her, would never sit down under superiority like that, so she is a Forsyth-Hope *with* a hyphen, and quite closely connected with the Duke of Fife, or Northumberland, I forget which," and she laughed humorously. "I expect Chip will coach you up in your family history very soon. I daren't attempt to tell you what grand relations you have been invested with for the benefit of the other school children; but she has managed to get hold of the knowledge that 'Fitz' is supposed to imply royal blood, so you are probably quite a near connection of the king's."

After that they had entered the little frame-house, and Kitt had learnt that in Kneller no one possessed a servant of any description, and no matter who you were, you had to do all your household work yourself.

"In this part of Canada it is almost impossible to get anyone, no matter what wages you are willing to pay, so one just has to make the best of it. I am more fortunate than some"—with a little smile—"because the one and only porter on the railway station comes to wash my kitchen floor on Saturday afternoons."

"And you do everything else?" Kitt enquired wonderingly.

"Everything, except the weekly washing. Thank goodness! there is a Chinese laundry where we can send that."

Kitt mentally decided that she should not like a Canadian Backwoods Settlement at all, but it was not long before she saw a great deal to admire, whether she

liked the life or not, for in the midst of all the commonplace drudgery there shone ever brightly the fine spirit and the underlying grit of these Children of the Outposts.

In the meantime, having decided that the longer one looked at the view from her window, the worse it grew, she went downstairs to see what her aunt was doing. Finding her in the kitchen, preparing a hot supper, she offered to help, while frankly explaining that she had never cooked anything in her life, and knew nothing whatever about the art.

"Never mind, dear," Edith Hope said cheerily; "I'm used to doing it all. Perhaps you will help me with the washing-up later on. I shall not be long now, so go into the drawing-room with the children. Chip has her own special little friend there and I expect they will amuse you."

Kitt, feeling thoroughly depressed, made her way to the pretty drawing-room, but as she entered, she was greeted by a stony glance from her small cousin, who raised her finger to her lip, and said "Sh—h—h!" and then turned her head to the sofa. Kitt followed her eyes, and saw the small dark head of a child reclining there, covered partly by a shawl.

"Who's that?" asked an eager little voice.

"You mustn't talk, you're very ill," said Chip peremptorily. "It's only Cousin Kathleen."

"Couldn't she be the father?" chirped the invalid, quite unsuppressed.

"What for? A father doesn't matter."

"Well, it would be much more fun to have a baby if there was a father."

Kitt's Irish eyes began to twinkle. "What in the world are you two playing at?"

"Gladys is Lady de Vere Montmorency, and she's just had a baby. She is very ill indeed. You can be the father, if you like; but I don't see that it matters," and Chip looked rather scornful.

"I'd just as soon look on," said Kitt with twitching lips.

The voice from the sofa chirped up again. "You

wouldn't have to do anything except say 'How are you, my darling wife, and how is the sweet baby?' Then you could talk a bit to the nurse. It would make it seem very real."

"You can be the doctor, if you'd rather," conceded Chip solemnly.

"I don't particularly want to be either. What funny games Canadian children play!"

Chip looked rather resentful. "Didn't you play at make-believe when you were small?"

"No, I don't think I did. Except when it was wild Indians on the moors, or pirates in the bay with Pat."

"Who's Pat?" Chip seemed curiously unfriendly as she stood in the middle of the room, and fired off questions at this new cousin from a little place called England. The invalid, growing restive at obtaining so little attention, emerged from her shawl, and producing a dilapidated doll, suddenly hurled it at her erstwhile nurse.

"It's no fun being stifled under this shawl, if you're just going to stand there and stop playing. If you're the nurse, it's time the baby had a bottle—there it is," and the unfortunate infant hit the neglectful nurse on the head. Chip looked ready to fly at the other child's face, but on second thoughts let the insult pass, and inquired again: "Who's Pat?"

"Pat lives at a farm close to where we live, and he and I grew up together."

"Are you going to marry him?" asked the eager little voice from the sofa.

Kitt stared at her in astonishment. "Why, what do you know about marrying?" she asked.

Both small children looked frankly amused.

"I'm going to marry a soldier," said Gladys, not condescending to answer so foolish a question.

"I'm going to marry a duke," said Miss Forsyth-Hope, whom some people banteringly called "Ugly-Face."

"You'll have to go to England for him," said Gladys, a trifle scathingly, "and then he won't have any money."

"The duke I shall choose will have lots of money," retorted Chip obstinately.

"Then he'll be rich and dissipated."

"That's better than being poor and constipated," snapped the future duchess, recalling vaguely a little story she had overheard her father relate.

For the first time since her father's death, Kitt indulged in a hearty laugh. "You children haven't the least idea what you're talking about," she said, when she could speak.

"Yes, we have," declared Chip, looking down her little snub nose with an offended air. "Canadian children are not stupid and dense like English children."

"Have you ever seen any English children?"

"Of course I have. I've been to England."

"Why, yes, I forgot. Father went to London to see you. But you didn't stay long."

"I didn't want to—hateful place! Granny Hope was so fussy, and Eva was such a baby. She cried herself into a fit one day because I threw my mug at her."

"Well, I don't wonder. Nice little English girls don't throw mugs at each other."

"They daren't. And if they did, they wouldn't hit."

"Her mother was sick all the way over," volunteered Gladys, who felt herself getting left out of the conversation.

"Poor Aunt Edith! I hope you took care of her nicely," said Kitt.

"I didn't approve," replied the superior Miss Forsyth-Hope coldly. "I thought it was vulgar."

"What do you think she did?" inquired Gladys.

"I can't imagine"—laughing, in spite of herself.

"Sang 'Rule Britannia' at the top of her voice, in the middle of the night, because she thought her mother wanted cheering up; and the stewardess had to get up to see what was the matter."

"No, she didn't. It was the deck steward," contradicted Chip.

Then she exclaimed suddenly, as a young man was

seen from the window approaching the front door: "Look! Here's Lionel! We'll make him play. What fun!" She ran to the window and pushed it open. "Walk right in, Lionel. You're just the one we want. You can come and be the father. Mother's cooking in the kitchen, and supper won't be ready for a quarter of an hour. Cousin Kathleen's come!" she shouted as an afterthought.

A few seconds later the door opened, and a pleasant, fresh-faced young man of about twenty-five joined them. "This is Lionel," said Chip to Kitt; "he's father's secretary. Sometimes he can play games quite well if he chooses."

"Yes, I'm Lionel—Lionel Hardcastle. And you are Miss Fitzgerald? I'm so glad you've come."

Kitt felt her heart warm to his breezy frankness, and she took his outstretched hand.

"I expect Chip has been a bit of a shock to you," he ran on; "but she's a fine specimen of a Canadian kid really, if she weren't so ugly."

"I'm not ugly." Chip reddened, and stamped her foot, like an infuriated little turkey-cock.

"Not ugly!"—derisively. "Well, that's good! Why, you know the boys at school call you Ugly Face."

"They don't. It's only Tommy Nettleton. And he's a horrid little beast."

"Come and play, Lionel," interposed Gladys eagerly. "Let's have a real make-believe. I'll be the baby this time, and you can be the father, and Miss Fitzgerald can be the mother."

Kitt looked embarrassed, but Lionel only laughed gleefully, and exclaimed: "No fear! I'm not going to play at being father to a thing like you."

"Yes, you will, Lionel," declared Chip. "Only I shall be the mother. Cousin Kathleen can be something else."

"I'm hanged if I'll own you as a wife! What next, I wonder? If you like, you and Gladys can be the father and mother, and we'll be the kids. One can't help one's parents, anyhow, and we're much younger than you two in sinful knowledge, I'll be bound."

"Yes, yes"—and Gladys clapped her hands—
"I'll be the father——"

"No you won't—I shall," declared Chip.

"I said it first."

"I don't care if you did."

"It isn't fair. Make her play fair, Lionel."

"I'm the eldest."

"That doesn't make any difference."

"It does."

"I shan't play at all."

"Well, don't, then."

"Crosspatch!"

"Worm!"

"You're a pink-eyed Kaffir!"—and Gladys stamped her foot.

"And you're a sooty-faced coon!"

"Really, you children——" began Kitt in a horrified voice; then, glancing at Lionel for moral support, she found him lying back in a big chair practically crying with laughter, and quite speechless. At that moment, just as Gladys made the first active assault, Mrs. Hope entered the room, and from the readiness with which she took in the situation, the scene was evidently not an unusual one.

"Now, Lionel," she began, "I expect this is your doing. They generally come to blows when you are here."

"On my honour—no," he gasped. "I haven't said a word. I couldn't if I'd tried," and he went off into another fit of laughter, while Mrs. Hope separated the angry combatants.

"You'll horrify poor Cousin Kathleen on her very first evening," she said. "She'll want to go back to England next mail."

Chip retired to the window, glowering ferociously, and Gladys shed a few angry tears.

"You shouldn't laugh at them so, Lionel," Mrs. Hope admonished him, lowering her eyes to hide the amusement in them. "You only make them worse."

"Not laugh! Well, if you'd heard the things they called each other!"

Mrs. Hope sighed. "It's those boys at school. They do pick up some amazing terms. Kathleen, dear, don't be too scandalised. Out here one is obliged to get used to a lot of things one doesn't like."

Lionel dug his hands deep into his trouser pockets and glanced slyly at Kitt. "I rather like it," he said. "Why not?"

Kitt decided to reserve judgment, but she made the discovery that Lionel reminded her of Pat, and her heart warmed to him still further.

CHAPTER XII

A LOVE LETTER.

EDITH HOPE had been right when she said there was a humorous side to life in the backwoods ; but Kitt found that there were many times when the irritation and drudgery of it very effectually swallowed up the humour, and she shrewdly surmised Edith herself was not free from weariness. "Washing-up," alone, was a daily burden. Kitt hated the greasy plates and knives and forks even more than she hated the greasy saucepans. Saucepan dirt seemed to her an honest kind of dirt, acquired honestly in the doing of duty ; but other people's plates and spoons and forks galled her fastidious soul. In consequence, not being especially unselfish, she left them as far as possible to her aunt, and tried to acquire a taste for keeping saucepans bright. Occasionally, Miss Forsyth-Hope, or Chip, or Ugly Face, as she was variously called, was requisitioned into giving a little help ; but as she had a far greater aptitude for impersonating anybody—from the Czar of Russia to a monthly nurse—they got very little help from her unless she was the Head Chef, and allowed to order them about.

Edith Hope made every effort she could to get some sort of a maid, offering sixty, even seventy, pounds a year, but no answers were forthcoming. The Chinaman in charge of her husband's saloon-car, who cooked for him on his long journeys, came to the house and helped them when the car was not in use ; but except for that, and the washing of the kitchen floor and the chopping of wood by the railway porter, as a favour, on Saturdays, they had to do everything themselves.

"It is not quite so bad out West," she told Kitt; "but, generally speaking, in Canada, one has to do a very great deal oneself. I had a nice girl at Calgary, but she very soon got married. They all marry quickly."

So Kitt schooled her distaste, and helped to cook, and wash up, and sweep, and clean, and contrived, like her aunt, to find a good many things in their neighbours to smile at.

The first time she walked out with Mrs. Hope, it was impossible not to see the faces that appeared at windows, and the heads that popped up over back-garden fences.

"You are quite the celebrity of the moment," Edith told her, seeing that she observed all the attention. "No one has been talked about so much for months."

Kitt smiled, but seemed little impressed either way. "I wonder why they put up such ugly houses," she said. "They all tail away so, behind."

Edith laughed. "Oh, that is truly Canadian in this part of the country. You see the front of the house is only to be looked at. Most of these people would never dream of living in it. I don't think they ever enter it, except to dust occasionally, and look at it. They all live in the lean-to at the back, and as the family grows, they add another, and another, lean-to—anything rather than desecrate the original abode by dwelling in it! I doubt if even *you* will be considered important enough to be received in a front room. I am always given my cup of tea in the living-room at the back. But I don't mind," she added cheerfully, "life at the outposts is a pretty strenuous thing, Kitt. One can afford to be very lenient to little fads and fancies that give pleasure. I expect you and I would hardly come through alive one half that many of these people have weathered. Several of them were at the front, you know, when they made the railroad, and have been hidden from Indians more than once."

Kitt looked round over the ugly little village with a new interest in her eyes. "It makes it very interesting," she said. "Have you roughed it much, as well?"

"Oh, yes! Several of us were in the West together in the early days—all in the employment of the C.P.R. That's why we were given the chance of coming East now. We thought we were all going to improve ourselves and get into touch again with advanced civilisation, but it was quite a mistake. Everything seems stagnant here compared with the West. I long to get back; and most of the others do also. This is our church. Shall we peep inside? It is rather a nice one."

Kitt opened the door and walked in, and the first things she saw were a boiled ham, a piece of salt pork, some butter, and a lump of cheese, reposing with a placid, contented air, along the front pew. All her Irish humour came uppermost and, bubbling over with mirth, she pointed to them, and whispered:

"Do the worshippers bring their nose-bags to church with them?"

"Oh, dear!" and her aunt bubbled over likewise, "Mrs. Hall, the clergyman's wife, told me the other day her larder was so ill-ventilated, nothing would keep in it. This is evidently her way out of the difficulty."

"Let's put the ham in the pulpit, and the salt pork in the reading-desk, and the cheese and butter in the font," said Kitt. "She would probably think devils had done it, especially if she happened to be Irish!"

But Mrs. Hope had learnt that in a small community one must be circumspect, and firmly led her away, though she could not stop her rippling with amusement all down the street.

"I wanted to take you to call on Mrs. Hall this afternoon," she said; "but I really daren't risk it now."

"Oh, no!"—Kitt broke out afresh—"I should be certain to introduce boiled hams and things, and disgrace myself."

"Except that Mrs. Hall wouldn't mind how much you laughed. She's very amusing herself. But Mr. Hall is different. He takes himself very seriously and does not approve of his wife's humour. A dreadful thing happened a few Sundays ago. Mrs. Hall is notoriously careless about things, and she has charge

of the communion wine and vessels. Somehow or other the bottle of wine got mixed up with other bottles. At the service, Mr. Hall took the first sip, as usual, and then he suddenly left the church, and was very sick. It turned out that a bottle of varnish had got placed where the wine should have been! I shall never forget Mrs. Hall's face when she told me about it. She kept saying 'Poor dear Willie!' and could get no further. In the end her description of his disgust, and 'soulful admonition,' as she called it, made us both hysterical."

They came to the Public Library, and Edith suggested that they should go in and get books.

Still feeling very bubbly, Kitt followed her, and a minute later subsided helplessly on to the nearest chair, and rocked with laughter.

"What's the matter now?" asked her aunt, nearly as helpless herself.

"That placard!" gasped Kitt, pointing to a paper pinned on to the door. It ran: "Subscription for Gentlemen, 5s. a year; Ladies, 3s. a year. Bath included."

"May I pay five shillings, and escape the bath?" rippled Kitt, and rocked more still.

"You're a disgraceful girl! I really can't take you out again," Edith tried to say severely, seeing that the librarian was looking at them with a stony eye. Then she added in a choked voice: "I think we haven't time to stay and choose books to-day—we must come again. Good afternoon, Mr. Walker. I had no idea it was so late," and she half pushed Kitt out before her into the street, and led her home, by this time almost hysterical.

"His face!" she gasped once. "Oh, did you see his face? Does he give the bath?"

When they reached the safe shelter of their own home, Edith pushed her down on to the sofa, and subsided into a big chair, where they could laugh until they were tired out.

"That was Mr. St. John Walker," she told her unruly niece. "A most 'cultured man,' according to his own description. I'm perfectly certain you've offended him. He wouldn't have the least notion what you were laughing at; and probably thinks it was at him personally."

"Well, it was—partly—I can't forget the stony horror on his face, behind those awful glasses; and he's so exactly like a cod-fish"—breaking out again. "He looked as if he thought no one ought to laugh in his presence. Is he—is he—by any chance—related to the Shah of Persia?"

"I won't talk to you any more; you make me feel weak all over. I must get the tea. Here comes Evelyn! We shall probably hear the latest from her."

Miss Forsyth-Hope entered a moment later with her school books, which she tossed aside, and then approached Kitt with a graciousness in her demeanour which was wholly new. Kitt noticed it, but was at a loss to account for it, as they had sparred pretty vigorously in the morning.

The mother, glancing through the open door, smiled to herself. "Evidently," she decided, "the verdict has been good." Kitt, for her part, looked curiously at the ugly little face of her young cousin, wearing an air of rather greater importance than usual.

"So you've been in the town?" said the child.

"Yes—if you call it a town."

There was a slight scowl. Then: "Most of the school kids saw you."

"Oh!" Kitt perceived that she was expected to be interested, but rather failed to give the impression.

"Don't you want to know what they said?" inquired Miss Forsyth-Hope.

"I don't know," replied Kitt a trifle lamely, then added: "What did they say?"

Chip evidently began to consider that her gracious attitude was unappreciated, so she pursed up her lips.

"Oh, nothing much," and she turned her head away.

Kitt had no desire to offend her again—once a day seemed quite sufficient—so she added, persuasively: "You may as well tell me now."

"Well, they approve of you."

"Oh!" Kitt was rather afraid of another laughing outburst, so she took refuge behind the monosyllable.

"They think you are *quite* pretty."

"Do they?" Kitt struggled to keep her face.

"Yes; aren't you pleased?"

"Oh, very"—she caught her breath a moment—"but who are 'they'?"

"Why, the school kids, of course! That is, chiefly the boys. The girls said you were too long and thin and pasty. But that's only because they were jealous when the boys said you were eighteen carat *Al Worcester Sauce*."

"Really!" ejaculated Kitt, and stopped short.

Miss Forsyth-Hope unbent a little further.

"Lionel told some one you were the prettiest girl who had ever been in Kneller."

"Then Lionel ought to know better," said Kitt shortly.

"He has no business to discuss me at all."

"I don't see why he shouldn't say you are pretty."

"It doesn't matter whether he says I am pretty or ugly. He ought not to discuss me."

"Highty-tighty!" said the small girl, and Kitt could only start laughing again.

The previous evening, as a birthday treat to Gladys, Lionel had taken the two children to dinner at the little hotel. Kitt now changed the subject by inquiring: "How did you enjoy your dinner last night?"

"Very much. I should like to go oftener."

Her mother came in at the moment, and added: "I hope you behaved very prettily."

The small face was abnormally solemn for a second, and then she heaved a regretful sigh, as over some pleasant, bygone memory.

"Did you remember all I told you?" her mother asked.

"Gladys was very ordinary," she remarked, unheeding the question. "I don't think anyone noticed her."

"But they did you?" inquired Kitt, with a twinkle.

"Yes." A short pause, and she went on: "As I walked up the room, I pretended I was Queen Mary."

The others laughed, but she seemed to see no cause for merriment herself, and a moment later Lionel walked in.

"So you had Royalty to dine with you last night," Kitt said, after they had greeted him.

"Oh, by Jove, yes! But she couldn't keep it up," and all his gay, boyish face broke into smiles.

"I did"—indignantly.

"You little fibber! What about the end of the dinner?"

Chip coloured.

"Do tell us," Kitt urged him.

"She was a queen all through the first and second courses, but she unbent a little over the pudding. She over-ate herself, and grew quite genial; but that didn't really matter. It was the *faux-pas* at the end that spoilt everything."

"It didn't," asserted Miss Forsyth-Hope. "No one heard."

"Why, they all heard"—teasingly. "I asked her if she had enjoyed herself"—he turned to Kitt—"and she heaved a very satisfied sigh, and exclaimed, unthinkingly: 'Yes, and it's so nice to have a dinner when you don't have to wash up the dishes afterwards!' Good old Queen!"

And Lionel's gay laughter rang through the room, considerably to Miss Hope's discomfiture.

Later, he and Kitt were left alone in the drawing-room, while Edith went upstairs with her daughter, and they spent a merry half-hour over Kitt's account of her afternoon walk. They were good friends already, for the secretary was a friendly personage at all times, and made no secret of his instantaneous admiration of Kitt; whereas she, after the stress of the past few weeks, found pleasure in his irresponsible boyishness. Undoubtedly he had done her good, for a faint colour was creeping into her pale cheeks, and a light into her lustreless eyes, and the little sad droop at the corners of her mouth was oftener lost in a smile. Edith Hope's motherly heart saw the change, and she encouraged Lionel to come as often as he liked to cheer her up. That evening he arranged to take her, on the morrow, to the shore of the lake, a lovely walk through the enveloping woods; and Edith excused herself from going, so that they might chatter more freely. Kitt was pleased at the thought of the excursion, but during the morning

a little cloud came down on her anticipation. The novelty of her surroundings, even though it entailed much odious washing-up, had helped her to forget for a little some of the annoyance and anxiety of the Montreal incident. It seemed far away now, just as she had said it would, and there was no reason, apparently, why she should ever think of it again.

Her aunt's cheerfulness and her cousin's originality, coupled with Lionel's unfailing high spirits, had created a new atmosphere; and it seemed quite probable that now the months would glide quietly past, until it was time for her to go back to Pat and the old dear joys, with the unfortunate incident for ever wiped out. Perhaps it would have been better in the end if she had felt less secure in those first weeks, for then she might have confided the difficulty to her aunt, and had the help of the older woman's experience. But to Kitt the view Norman had taken seemed absurd and unnecessary, and she scorned the thought of any serious mischance.

Still, she wished no letter had come to her that morning of the excursion. When her aunt came in with the mail and remarked, "One for you, Kitt," she looked up hopefully, thinking it was from Pat. But it was not a British postage-stamp, and her aunt observed it.

"A Canadian letter," she said casually. "Have you friends in Canada?"

Kitt looked puzzled as she took the envelope and scanned the unfamiliar handwriting.

"I don't know . . ." she said, and stopped short rather suddenly, flushing a little.

Edith Hope noticed the flush, and half-consciously registered it.

Kitt took her letter to the window and opened it. It ran:—

"I am sending you these lines in case you are succeeding too well in your determination to forget me. It was only one chapter that closed when I left you on Kneller Station; not the whole book. My quest is mine still. What are you doing, you

little Irish girl at Kneller, while I camp out in the vast, pathless forests, dreaming of you by day and night? Fancy! this is the first real love letter I have ever written. The others, if worthy the name at all, were quite different. And you don't want it! Will probably burn it at once! And you will not condescend to reply: I shall be obliged to take it for granted that you are well and passably happy. But I am glad I saw your aunt. She has a fine face. You will be all right with her until I can take care of you myself. That will come some day, for I will not let you forget me, or escape me, 'Kathleen Mavourneen.'

"Adieu!

"NORMAN LUTTERWORTH."

Kitt glanced out of the window and across the little ugly town, and a strange tremor seemed to shake her for a moment. It came back suddenly—all that he had said, all that had happened, all the forcefulness of the man himself.

Then her lips tightened. "He cannot compel me, and we need not meet again," ran her thought. Then her aunt saw her tear the letter into small shreds and throw it into the wastepaper basket.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PATHLESS FOREST.

WHEN Norman had finished writing his letter a few days previously he sat back in his camp chair and smiled faintly. It amused him that he should write his first real love letter to a woman who did not want it—to a mere girl, in fact, who had not very much perhaps to commend her when compared with various fascinating women who had left him utterly indifferent. He felt vaguely that here was an enigma, and no amount of puzzling would solve it. And just because of that he liked his enigma all the more. Here came out the æsthetic strain in him, which circumstances had hitherto somewhat stifled. All his life things had come to him too easily. An Eton scholarship that he did not want; high university degrees that did not matter; land, money, horses, sport, women; all had been his for the asking. So the savour had gone out of life. He was not even sorrowful, like the rich young man in the Bible. He was simply bored. No rare flower growing out of reach had called to him to strive and get it. No mysterious distance had summoned him to dare the pathless wastes. Politics disgusted him with their blatant self-service. There were no bridges for him to build, no railways to make, no mountains to level, no waterways to cut. In the great hive of life he was asked to be a drone; the stimulus of desire was taken from him by the measure of good things handed to him unsought, unwon. He did not, like Alexander, sigh for other worlds to conquer. He merely asked, in moments of insight, for one small quest to call to him above the wearisome, toneless commotion of

the little things of life, to be his own particular guerdon straight from the hands of the gods : a quest not necessarily big in itself, but of whatever essence was needed to stir the depths that he knew lay sleeping inside him.

Such a quest could not be companioned by ease. Ease of realisation would have rendered it null. Only by winning with the odds against him could he find the final satisfaction of his dream. So he smiled a little to himself as he folded his letter to the obstinate, unsophisticated, wilful Irish girl from wild Donegal, who would have nothing to do with him. Then for a while he dreamed, seeing the long, curling lashes wet with angry tears, the mobile lips quivering with suppressed fury, the white cheeks flushing as the hot blood rose. He remembered again that wild, amazing moment when he had wanted to pin her arms to her side and kiss the fascinating mouth roughly and resolutely. He almost wished now that he had yielded to the impulse. But how good it was only to have known the Desire ! Many men went through life and never knew anything better than a tame wish, easily gratified. He had supposed himself hopelessly of them. But now——

Yes, he might smile indeed. For the dusty, time-worn cover had fallen for him. He had seen behind it—into the heart of things. He knew why Jacob had been content to wait seven years ; and yet again seven years. It was not all a myth, a pleasant story woven for young ears. There could be the one woman, beside whom all others were valueless. He knew it when he saw the aversion in Kitt's eyes, and yet only wanted to crush her and kiss her. Whatever her merits or demerits, she was that *one woman* for him. Nothing else mattered. If it took seven years to win her he would still strive. All his manhood mysteriously backed him. Hundreds of miles away, with only the recollection of her declared hate to comfort him, he felt himself her master, and swore to himself that in due time he would prove himself so. Yet he hoped it would not take long. After all life itself is but short.

He thought of her eyes with their lights and shadows, and depths and laughter ; of her little patrician head

with the straight nose and the sweet lips ; of the lovely Irish colouring of her blue-black hair, her fair satin skin and violet eyes—and all his longing rose up and tormented him for the chance of that one moment again, when he might crush her in his arms until she cried for mercy.

For relief he commenced to write another letter, a difficult one this time, though he did not appear greatly concerned over it. As long as he made his meaning quite clear, the wording was of no great moment.

“ My dear Aunt ” (it ran)—

“ When I had my last interview with you in London, and let myself be over-ruled by your advice—partly, I am afraid, because it saved me the trouble of doing anything else—I little thought I should ever sit down to write you this letter. Forgive me if I add that I had lost all hope of it, and was reconciled to go the poorer for evermore, because it is usually useless to kick against the pricks. But, in the face of all likelihood, the surprising thing has happened ; and to-day I write the letter I would then have taken any odds would never be written at all.

“ It is idle for me to waste words upon the obvious nature of the compact between Hester and myself—perhaps I ought to say between you and me concerning Hester. We planned a *mariage de convenance*, because it suited *you*, and Hester was too young to act for herself and I was too idle to do anything but drift.

“ Well, my dear aunt, to be very frank with you, though it does not sound nice, I am going to cry off my bargain. I should certainly have more compunction in writing this if I thought Hester’s affections or inclinations were engaged ; but as I am persuaded they are not, I put down the bald truth. As far as she is concerned, I am glad. She is too good to be disposed of for convenience, even to suit you. The miracle has happened to me, and it may happen to her—God grant it does !—and in

any case I am her firm friend, for better, for worse. All which leads up to my point, which I had meant to reach without half so much preamble. Since our interview on the eve of my departure, I have met the only woman. She will have nothing to do with me at present, but that is beside the question. I shall marry her or none. I have written more fully to Hester and placed myself in her hands entirely, knowing well what she will say; and I have told her that I hope the little that has passed between us may prove the bond of a special friendship for all time. You alluded once or twice to a young naval officer whom you evidently *feared* she was fond of, but who, apparently, was lacking in this world's goods from your point of view. Will you let me be their Fairy Godfather? That is, of course, if your surmise was correct, and the young man is in every other way desirable.

"If I had a sister she would have been well-dowered. I am, quite unnecessarily, all that much the richer. Then, why should I not adopt Hester? Let me do this, as a token that I am forgiven; and let me, presently, give Hester to the man of her heart in my official capacity as head of the family, instead of accepting her as an offering upon the family shrine in order that she may reign at Lutterworth Manor. I believe that she herself will give me her good wishes in my quest, for I have still far to go in winning my goal. That I think it worth while, under such circumstances, cannot fail to convince a woman of the world, like yourself, that I am in deadly earnest.

"A note to this address will be brought after me, for while My Lady disdains, I possess my soul as best I can at the old hunting-ground.

"Your affectionate nephew,

"NORMAN LUTTERWORTH."

Having written that letter also, and duly stamped and sealed it, he sent a runner off to the nearest town and turned his attention to dinner.

Then a long day for the morrow had to be planned with his hunter and a few details arranged before he retired to the little stretcher-bed in his tent, to sleep soundly under the stars. And the stars that had glistened down at him with friendly eyes in Montreal because they approved the *big things*, glistened with yet greater approval upon the little bare tent where the man's lean, muscular body rested contentedly.

For, physically, at least, his riches had never pampered him. If no earnest, strenuous endeavour could stand to his credit, so no idle, indulgent love of the "flesh-pots" stood to his debit. Looking back now, it was as if he had been simply waiting. And he had waited cleanly. The things that many men crave for money to buy, he, having the money, had not bought.

His money, in fact, had never meant very much to him. It pleased him to have the best of everything, as it pleases most men; but he had never made any parade of his wealth, and all his life he had been a generous giver; though he would have been as quick as anyone to point out that giving had cost him nothing, and therefore held small merit. Things that he wanted for himself, such as the warmest corner upon deck, he took, as has been seen, unashamedly.

But, in the face of all, when the big thing called, the thing that to him seemed worth while—he was ready.

That was why the stars glistened approvingly on the little bare tent in the pathless forest.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCERNING CANADA.

DOWN by the shore of the Great Lake, Kitt and Lionel sat on a fallen tree and ate their sandwiches. Lionel had been able to leave his work early because it was Saturday, and Edith had arranged to come part of the way to meet them with Chip and Gladys and bring tea. The distance from Kneller was about four miles, and the path lay through a forest of low trees, which had nearly shed the last of their leaves, and through which the late autumn sun shone crisply.

As they walked they chatted gaily, and for the first time since the break-up of her home Kitt was almost her old self—the Donegal Kitt, lithe, active, careless, hatless, swinging along as in her own loved land.

Norman's letter was torn up and thrown away, and for a little while she could very well forget it. A long distance off, in a similar forest, a determined, masterful man was creeping through the brushwood, hot upon the trail of a splendid moose he had been tracking since morning, and was just about to make the detour that would bring him within range in the right position; showing all through the hunt that, given a set purpose, he was not easily thwarted. But what was that to a fearless, Irish lass, swinging lithely along with delicious autumn scents filling her nostrils?

"I like this, Lionel," she said, with the first touch of real enthusiasm he had yet heard in her voice; "yes, I like this. It reminds me of some of our wild places. We haven't many trees in my part of Donegal—it's mostly moors and mountains, and splendid headlands—but there's the same sense of bigness about it. Room to

stretch one's arms," and she flung hers out with a joyous movement.

"I'm glad you like it, but"—his eyes were wistful a moment—"how you love Donegal, don't you?"

"Love it! Och! the dear land—faith of me fathers—'tis the green paradise, is Erin!"

Something stirred his spirit.

"But it's asleep," he asserted, "like a mossy bank with a few flowers growing on it. There's nothing *doing* there. Why go to sleep when you are young? Leave that for the fireside when you are old! This is the *real* land. Here it's all *doing*, or you're left behind—likely enough to die—and why not? It's the survival of the fittest, anyhow. Couldn't you love Canada, too?" he asked wistfully.

"I believe I love it already. I like the bigness, even when one does have to do all the washing-up—ugh!"

"And think what it's going to be some day!" His eyes glowed. "I'd have been a 'waster' at home. I was, in fact. But it's different out here. There's such a splendid swing on. I want to go with it."

"I don't care about that," Kitt said airily. "I think the general air of progress is a little boring. But I love the thought of these wide, boundless forests and a lake that is a sea, and I'm sure I should love the prairie."

"But not without any money. One must get on and make money. It's necessary for such a lot of things."

"It isn't in Donegal. There, no one bothers. The butcher and the baker and the grocer have to be paid occasionally—that's all."

"I wonder if you'll like it as much when you go back?" Again he spoke with that wistful note. It was obvious that the Irish lass had unwittingly conquered another heart.

"Why, of course I shall!" Her eyes grew dreamy. She saw the mountains of Galway across the Bay of Donegal, and she and Pat were threading their way out through the islands and channels, laughing because the old boat was so clumsy and leaky and generally unsafe. "But I'd love a new boat," she finished,

irrelevantly ; " the old one will scarcely hold together until I get back."

Then they came to the shore of the lake, where miniature waves rose and fell and ran up the shingle at their feet, and in the delicious sunshine they gave themselves up to sandwiches and joyful contemplation. Kitt was not much inclined to talk. It was long since she had sat by a vast span of water and dreamed. In spirit she was back on her own loved shore.

Lionel did not greatly mind. He could sit and watch her. Already that was enough for him. Then suddenly he made a remark that dropped like a pebble into a still lake, disturbing its serenity and spreading wide circles.

" I suppose lots of men are in love with you ? "

It came so unexpectedly that Kitt scarcely followed his meaning at first, and had to recall herself resolutely. Then, as he was waiting for a reply, she coloured and said :

" I—I—don't know. I don't think so."

He noted the tell-tale blush, although it died away as quickly as it came, and she turned her gaze again to the water, trying to appear indifferent.

" It must be so," he ran on, following his own thought.

" You've everything about you to make them."

Kitt tried hard to keep her attention on the lake, but an insistent voice of memory sounded in her ears :

" Has anyone ever told you how pretty you are, Kathleen ? "

And strangely enough, no one had told her before. She wondered if Pat had even noticed it, Pat, the only one to whom she especially wanted to appear pretty. But, of course, he would love her either way. He had never noticed, because to him it made no difference. She was just Kitt to him, and that meant everything.

But she wished Lionel had not introduced the subject. It brought back to her mind the letter of the morning, and she had so satisfactorily forgotten it. How determined he was, that keen-faced man who had coolly annexed her ! But he was very far away—thank goodness for that ! Surely she need not fear him across leagues of forest.

"I wonder what sort of a man you'll marry," Lionel ran on. "A manly chap, I guess, who can shoot, fish, and ride anything, and all that." He sighed as he glanced away, "I wish I'd a hundred thousand pounds, and was a bit older and cleverer."

Kitt rallied him kindly, for she had grown very fond of his gay irresponsibility, and he seemed to be rather damping her delicious afternoon.

"What does it matter? Don't let us think of anything but the lake and sky and sunshine."

"You ought to want to think of sweethearts, Kitt," he said teasingly, "at your age."

"I don't know anything about them. I never had one in my life."

He watched her smilingly, and then fell a-dreaming until a little later they started home, to meet the others at the appointed spot. And then all dreams and hopes were quickly enough banished in laughter over Chip's originality and Gladys' audacities. Games of make-believe had to be played, and by the time they reached home, as Lionel plaintively put it, "there's really no being quite sure who we are now."

After that afternoon two or three more peaceful weeks followed. Many and various ladies called upon Kitt and invited her to their dwellings, but only a few honoured her with tea in a front room.

The days were necessarily made up of little things in such a settlement as Kneller, where the only road, except the path to the lake, was the railway track running east and west. Most days Edith and Kitt walked along it for exercise, standing aside on the narrow margin when trains came past, but sometimes they were frankly too bored to trouble to take a walk at all. In the town itself they had a few little excitements—notably the parochial suppers given as friendly evenings by the different denominations. The Methodists led off with a "Fish Supper, singing and music included, tickets one shilling each," and made quite a hit. Not to be outdone, the Church followed suit with a "Fowl Supper—dancing included, tickets one shilling each"; but relations became a little strained after too many

facetious persons had inquired of their friends if they went to the "foul" supper the Church gave. They were righted again when the laugh was turned on to the Baptists. This enterprising sect decided to go one better than either of the others, and after considerable trouble managed to secure a consignment of oysters; after which they proudly displayed the notice:

"Oyster Supper—lemonade and games included; tickets one shilling each."

But when the guests were gathered together, anticipation in their eyes and water in their mouths, there was a period of long duration in which nothing happened. Then an agitated minister's wife slipped up to Edith Hope and said in a low voice:

"They're quarrelling in there because one says the oysters have to be cooked in their shells, and another says they haven't, and no one knows how to get them out, anyway. Can you help us?"

Fortunately, Edith Hope was acquainted with the ways of oysters, and the Baptist supper was saved from irretrievable disaster. How they laughed over it together! Aunt and niece manufacturing their own gaiety out of whatever material was procurable, while they got through the daily drudgery of the household work they both hated. Kitt fell readily into the spirit of the place, and finding that Chip had indeed solemnly stated her close relationship to the royal house of England, accepted the respectful attention bestowed upon her, and carried her head high beneath her borrowed plumes. Chip, of course, was an unfailing source of delight to anyone with a humorous sense. She wrote and acted plays for their benefit—impersonated the greatest living prima donna, and sang in a piercing falsetto that aroused the street, and was perfectly convinced in her own mind that she was a great artist. And one day, when the canary died, she read the entire Funeral Service over it, Gladys being chief mourner. Kitt found both the children weeping copiously over the little cardboard box that contained the carcass, and though neither of them had cared in the least for the canary living, the pathos of the Funeral Service as

Chip read it, made them inconsolable when the bird was dead. Half an hour later the sounds of an angry quarrel brought Kitt to the rescue, to discover this time that a wordy war was in progress because Chip said that Cain married his sister, and Gladys said that he hadn't a sister, and she *knew* that he married a black woman.

"Why a black woman?" Kitt could not refrain from asking in mild wonder.

"She doesn't know," declared Chip scornfully. "There wasn't anyone else but his sister for him to marry."

"There was," in angry accents. "I heard Mr. Hall say it was a heathen."

"He didn't. He said we weren't to ask."

"So you promptly did?" suggested Kitt.

"Anyhow, he's a silly old fool," said Miss Forsyth-Hope, as if that were quite sufficient excuse for forbidden questions.

"It's very wicked to call anyone a fool," declared Gladys. "You are in danger of hell fire."

"I'm not—any more than you are. Lionel is always calling people fools. So they *are* fools."

"Now come, you two, don't quarrel so," urged Kitt. "Just after you've buried that poor little bird, too! I think you had better read the Funeral Service through again to soothe your ruffled feelings."

"We didn't like it much," commented Chip, "except the crying. To-morrow we're going to marry Gladys' dog Peter to our cat, and I'm going to read the Wedding Service."

"I think it is very profane of you," admonished Kitt.

"What does 'profane' mean?" asked Gladys. "I'm sure Peter would rather marry a cat than another dog."

"Oh, I give you both up!" she laughed. "Why can't you be rational and play with your dolls like other children?"

"Because we're not other children," said Chip in a tone of finality. "Come along, Gladys, let's go and

see if there's anyone we like in the express to-night." And they marched off, to wait the arrival of the west-bound mail. Kitt related to her aunt all that had passed, and though Edith Hope was as amused as ever, there was a touch of regretfulness in her eyes.

"One can't help wishing occasionally that the children out here were more like the children in the Old Country. Chip is an amusing child, and there's no doubt she is very clever, but I'm not in the least blind to her faults. She is too precocious altogether. I would like to have kept her a real child, like the children at home."

"Are they all precocious out here?"

"I'm afraid they are. American and Canadian children are grown up almost as soon as they can speak plainly. I used to try to suppress Chip, and her father has done his best, but he is away so much, and everything is undone by this Board School Mixed Education. One can only look at it in a matter-of-fact light. In Canada Chip will be a success, although in England she might be tabooed entirely. But as it is in Canada she is likely to live, need I worry if she does not grow up according to my idea of an attractive English girl? Anyhow, she never wants to go there again. She and my mother-in-law frankly detested each other, and told each other so with considerable force. I shall never forget the day her granny offered her sixpence if she would sit still for half an hour. She kept it up for a quarter of an hour, the perspiration literally beading on her face with the effort to remain on the chair; and then she suddenly jumped off and said: 'It's not worth it, Granny—you may keep your sixpence!'"

"She's rather a dear, sometimes," Kitt allowed, smiling; "and then, at other times, I detest her. She told me not to give her so much lip this morning, and when I boxed her ears she just shrugged her shoulders and said, 'You think you're great, just because you're fresh from England, and the boys say you're pretty; but you aren't half so nice as mother, for all your fine face.'"

They both laughed, and Edith ran on a little thoughtfully.

"It's just what we give with all the rest—we don't leave behind home and friends only. Here it's new conditions, new hopes, new anticipations and a new kind of children. A woman fresh from home a little while ago, asked me why I didn't send Chip to England at once before she was quite spoilt. I thought about it for a time, and Fred and I talked it over; then we decided that she was sure to make her home here, and as long as she could hold her own in Canada that was the main point."

"I think she will do that all right."

"Yes. It's amazing how attractive she is already. The school-boys adore her, and it isn't her face, because I think she is quite extraordinarily plain. Gladys, on the other hand, is so pretty—but there is no rivalry—Chip has it all her own way always." She broke off and changed the subject. "I hope you won't forget us all when you get back to Donegal, Kitt. Come and see us again soon. I suppose you will be getting married before long. Is there a favourite, I wonder?"

Kitt's tell-tale blush dyed her ivory cheeks, but she only laughed and said, "No, of course not."

Her aunt wondered why she coloured up, and decided that there undoubtedly was a favourite. Then Fred Hope came in, bringing the mail, and as he handed the letters to his wife she saw at once that the uppermost letter was again a Canadian one for Kitt, and in the same handwriting as the former one.

"What about these Canadian letters, old girl?" she said affectionately. "No one could mistake that for a woman's writing," and she handed Kitt her missive.

Kitt felt her colour deepening, and wished she had gone to the post office herself. When she had read the contents, she felt only angry and disturbed.

"Little Irish girl (he wrote), I've had some splendid sport, and now I'm going home. I shall stay a few days in Kneller on my way through. I hope the hotel isn't too horrible, but if it's the last word in purgatorial hostels I shall endure it. Don't make it worse than it

need be by refusing to be friendly. And you needn't think I'm going to worry you with my tiresome adoration. I only want to see that you're all right. The adoration is still there, but it will keep for a more propitious season. I will send you a wire to tell you when I arrive."

Kitt folded the letter slowly, and her lips shut very firmly. How dare he follow her again, and invite himself to Kneller? If only she could get away until he had gone through she certainly would. She was interrupted in her thoughts by her aunt's voice saying pleasantly:

"Well, is he going to show himself? Are we to have the pleasure of meeting him?"

Kitt hesitated a second, and then replied:

"Mr. Lutterworth is going to England, and he says he shall stay a day or two in Kneller to—to—see if I want to send any messages. Of course I don't, or I should post them. I can't imagine why he is coming. I scarcely know him at all."

"Perhaps he wants you to know him better——"

"Oh, no, he doesn't! We didn't get on at all well. It is just a fad."

"I feel I ought to ask him here, if he is nice; but it is so difficult without a servant."

"Of course, you can't ask him. And I'm not at all sure that he is nice. He'll be all right at the hotel; and if he isn't he can go on to Montreal." With which Kitt apparently dismissed him from her mind, and Edith decided that she was perfectly heartwhole as far as this unknown Mr. Lutterworth was concerned.

CHAPTER XV.

A SOCIAL EVENING.

BUT though Kitt appeared perfectly unperturbed, she was secretly in a ferment of anxiety. She resented Norman's coming intensely, and was fearful lest he should tell her aunt anything about Montreal, and enlist her help to bring about what had now become his heart's desire. Such a thought wronged Norman, for what he could not win for himself he certainly would not take through the persuasion of some one else. But the patience of the Great Quest which was now his she did not understand, and foolishly racked her mind with imaginary coercions in which possibly her aunt would aid and abet him. She did not in the least realise that Norman meant exactly what he said—that he should stay a few days in Kneller just to see how she was, and that he had no intention of worrying her with his attention. In the two days before his arrival she worked herself into yet more of a fever, and then, in a moment of haste, sheltered herself behind a subterfuge. A subterfuge, she perceived, might very well serve her purpose for the time being, and, as far as one could tell, need have no harmful effects whatever.

"As far as one could tell," and indeed, how short a distance is that, where no one may know what the next moment shall bring forth?

And if Kitt was to blame in that she seized upon what seemed to her a weapon, without over much thought for consequences; so was she undeniably a victim of fate, in that no fault of her own had placed her in her anomalous and difficult position.

It happened that the day before Norman's arrival Lionel had a half-holiday, and persuaded Kitt to make one more excursion to the Lake before winter closed in upon them and obliterated their pathway.

Kitt went gladly enough. The occasion offered respite from the thoughts that worried her, and she dearly loved to stand beside the vast expanse of water. But almost as soon as they had started, she perceived something new in Lionel's manner that was a little disturbing. When they reached the Lake, he could contain himself no longer, and told her in his eager, boyish way that he adored her, and would continue to do so all his life. Kitt was a good deal taken aback, but she had a sensible head upon her shoulders, and instead of laughing at him, as she felt inclined to do, reasoned with him frankly upon the little they knew of each other, and how absurdly young they both were, and how very long it was likely to be before he could afford to marry. Lionel took it very well, because he knew there was truth in every word; but being very youthful, and not too well balanced, he persisted in making light of every difficulty, if only she would be engaged to him. Finally he pleaded for a trial. "Just between you and me," he urged, "so that I have something to live and work for."

Kitt looked into his face questioningly. "But I am not the least bit in love with you, Lionel; only very fond of you, in a friendly way."

"It might come. I would not presume upon it in any way. I only want to be able to think about it when I am alone."

"A kind of make-believe game, like Chip's?"—with a little smile.

"If you like—why not? Even that would be better than nothing."

Then a sudden thought caught Kitt as in a whirlwind, and upset her usual store of common sense, and she saw an avenue of escape, for the time being, from a pressing worry.

If she could calmly state to Norman that she was engaged to Lionel, there would be no course open for

him but to retreat and forget her. If the thought of fairness to Lionel crossed her mind, she gave it but scant attention.

In about three months, or perhaps a little more, she would be returning to Donegal. During that time she could break to Lionel that she could not care for him enough to marry him, and when she got home, Pat would be waiting for her. In the meantime Norman must have passed entirely out of her life, and all the tangle from that one unfortunate night, be undone. With every second the desirability of the subterfuge gained ground.

She saw it more and more clearly as an excellent solution, which, in the end, surely need not hurt anyone. Lionel would not be much worse off than if she refused to have anything to do with him at once; and in any case it was his own idea.

"It couldn't be anything else but a make-believe," she remarked tentatively, gazing over the water.

"Then let it be that," with a ring of hopefulness in his voice. "Let us make-believe we are engaged to each other, for three months."

"And after that?"—doubtfully.

"After that I believe I can make you care for me enough to be really engaged."

"And if you cannot?"

"I suppose I must make the best of it"—gloomily.

Kitt had sense enough to see that her plan was not quite straightforward, and to dislike it accordingly; but at the time she was so determined to thwart Norman once for all, that she let herself be overruled. Before they returned, the make-believe was arranged, and she suffered Lionel to kiss her just once, to seal the compact. "But not again," she insisted, "until I have quite made up my mind."

"Then it isn't much of a make-believe," he murmured.

"We'll give it up, if you like," she answered airily; "it was your suggestion." By which speech Kitt showed herself a very true daughter of Eve, for all her secluded existence in Donegal.

"Have it as you wish," he yielded; "anyhow it is better than nothing."

So they returned again to the meeting-place, where Edith and the children awaited them with tea; and Kitt was in better spirits than she had been since Norman's letter came, because she believed herself entirely safeguarded from him, and that the changed conditions would cause him to shorten his visit to one day.

He arrived about midday, and in the afternoon came quite casually to call upon her at her aunt's. From the moment he entered, Kitt felt somehow that he was different. There was no special note in his voice that anyone could detect, and when he looked at her, it was with merely friendly, humorous eyes. On the other hand, he proved himself a charming visitor, in a way that greatly surprised her. Was it possible that this attractive man, with his pleasant voice and winning smile, was the unsociable hermit, who glowered upon all friendly advances from his fellow-passengers on the ship? With feminine unreasonableness she immediately decided that he was double-faced.

If he happened to want anything and it suited him, evidently he could be as nice as anyone; if otherwise, he was only selfish and rude. Kitt observed his charm, and refused to let her resentment be assuaged by it.

It was merely a pose. It suited him to please her aunt. That he succeeded was very obvious. Edith Hope quite blossomed out as she chatted to him. It was long, indeed, since she had met a man of Norman's type. She astonished her niece by the ease with which she met him on his own ground. Kitt herself took very little part in the conversation, and presently she became aware that neither of them seemed to miss her.

Occasionally Norman glanced in her direction, but it appeared to be with a politely casual interest only. Kitt thought she might as well have saved herself a good deal of perturbation, and deepened her belief in his insincerity. If she could only have known it, Norman read her thoughts like a book.

He knew perfectly well that she had been perturbed by his prospective visit, and he realised the wisdom of disarming her anxious fears at the beginning. He judged also that it would be to his advantage to pique her a little, by paying small heed to her, after she had doubtless expected marked attention. When Chip came in, he noticed her even less, perceiving at once what a little original the small girl was. Chip was immensely impressed by the visit of the charming Englishman, and nothing could exceed the stately graciousness with which she laid herself out to please him. Her ugly little face was wreathed in gracious smiles, when she began to talk with him, as if she were her own mother, and the twinkle deepened in Norman's grey eyes. Once Kitt seemed about to interpose, as if she thought Chip ought to be suppressed, but he signed to her to desist. He would not for worlds have had the humour of the situation lost.

Finally Chip informed him she was giving a recitation at the Annual School Social Evening held at the Library that night, and invited him to come and hear her.

"I shall be delighted," Norman assured her. "How fortunate I was to hit upon this particular date!"

"Yes"—with artless candour—"so I thought. Besides my recitation, there will be a play, and some of the children will give Musical Drill."

"I'm afraid you will only be very bored," Edith interposed doubtfully.

"Nothing of the kind, I am sure. I shall like very much to go."

"Then will you honour us at dinner beforehand?" "with a little laugh—"that is, if you can put up with amateur cooking, for we have no maid of any description?"

Again Norman accepted readily, and shortly after went back to his hotel to dress. When Chip saw him in evening dress she was so fascinated that she could not take her eyes away from him, and the prospective duke she proposed presently to marry lost heavily. Unless the duke were exactly like this distinguished-looking stranger, she would have nothing to do with

him. On the other hand, Lionel, who was also of the party, scowled visibly. Because he was not in evening clothes himself, and knew no one else in the hall would be, he chose to think Norman's dressing snobbish, and in bad taste. He expressed the opinion freely in an aside to Kitt, but Kitt gave him scant sympathy. She did not like Norman; at least, she fancied she had an undying grudge against him; but in common fairness, she had to admit that he looked the well-groomed English gentleman he was. Norman noticed the disapproval in Lionel's usually sunny eyes, and was faintly amused at it. He also noticed his sheepish adoration of Kitt, and wondered a little that she was not more bored by it.

On the contrary, she seemed to encourage it. He thought it rather a pity that the dull monotony of life in a backwoods settlement was stifling her sense of humour, for that she had one in a commendable degree he was quite satisfied, and hoped it would blossom out again in more congenial surroundings.

When they all started out to walk to the entertainment hall, he noticed, with his keen observation, that Edith Hope made an effort to couple him with Kitt, and annex Lionel for herself. But as both Kitt and Lionel apparently had other views for themselves, she did not succeed in her manœuvres, and in the end he and she went on ahead and the two younger ones followed. In the hall itself, however, Norman thought it about time to bestir himself, and being naturally dexterous at getting the thing he wanted, Kitt found herself seated between him and her aunt, while Lionel was driven to take a seat nearer the platform because he had some small official part to play in the programme.

* * * * *

Then the entertainment began—and to pass it with a mere allusion were almost a crime, for surely, only in a backwoods settlement could such an astounding "Social Evening" be enacted.

Every one in Kneller was there: not only all the grown-ups, and all the school children, but all the

babies of every size and description were brought, and kept up, through the evening, a running accompaniment of howling in various keys; and judging by their number, the heart of Mr. Roosevelt must have rejoiced over the Empire-work of that particular little section. As for the entertainment itself, it must at least be said that it was characterised by a thoroughness entirely in keeping with that progressive township.

The children came first with their musical drill, and when the small girls appeared, led by no less a personage than Miss Evelyn Mary Forsyth-Hope, a certain trio at the back shook with silent laughter. For not a tremor disturbed the awful solemnity of Chip's face, as she marched along, snub nose high in the air, deigning no glance to right or left. Once an uppish little curly-haired girl turned round and spoke to the small girl behind her, but immediately some terrible rebuke was uttered by the awe-inspiring leader, and the dimples died swiftly away.

"I wonder who she imagines herself to be?" murmured Kitt, and between little gasps, Edith answered: "She told me she was going to pretend she was Lord Kitchener . . . but I thought she was only joking . . ."

Chip pretended well, for not the great general himself could have been more stonily indifferent to the amused or critical attitude of the crowd. To the last her features never relaxed; and when she led her small column off the stage, her ugly little dough dumpling face expressed only immense satisfaction—doubtless, at the way her performance must have impressed Norman.

After that followed the items of the concert, when one could only marvel, not at mere nervousness before so critical an audience, but that anyone dared contribute at all. The reception of each item seemed to be a purely personal affair, and depended upon the performer's standing in the town, and whether he or she had plenty of friends or not. Remarks were freely called to them from the audience—not always of a nature to inspire—while fond and proud parents encouraged their performing offspring in tones that well-nigh drowned the

recitation or whatever it might be. One small girl even stopped in the middle of her piece to argue a point with her mother.

"You've left out a verse," called mother.

"I haven't," came back indignantly.

"The one about little Charlie."

"This isn't the little Charlie piece at all. I'm supposed to be saying the one about the Boy Scout and the Flag——"

"Well, wasn't the boy's name Charlie?" Mother was not to be entirely squashed.

"Of course it wasn't. He hadn't a name. Now you've made me forget. I shall have to begin all over again." And she did, much to the amusement of the audience.

The trio at the back were so convulsed with suppressed merriment half the time that Kitt almost forgot her antipathy to Norman. For Norman was at his best, seeing the funniest side in everything, and making dry comments that were irresistible. Kitt would have been no true humorist, to nurse resentment at such a time, and in her momentary abandon Norman saw again that sudden surprising loveliness he had first seen in Montreal. Her cheeks flushed, and her eyes shone, and her smile seemed to him the most fascinating he had ever beheld.

After the concert came the play, and in every sense it was the climax. To be heard at all above the growing din of babies and parents, the actors and actresses had to shout at the top of their voices, and even then only a small percentage among the audience took the trouble to listen.

The hero, in frock coat and white duck trousers, shouted impassioned words on his knees, as if he were commanding a regiment; while the lady of his adoration was only known to reply by the fact that her lips moved. Then, a scene of intense pathos followed, in which the heroine was seen to be weeping bitterly; while the hero was either tearing his hair, or trying to get out of his coat, but the why or the wherefore was utterly lost upon the audience; for at the most distressful moment a bench went over backwards in the rear of the hall,

with some eight or ten occupants, and the surrounding spectators shouted as one man with laughter at the apparition of various feet in the air, where a moment before had been heads. This awoke numbers of babies, who had been finally lulled to sleep, and their shrill wails drowned any further efforts on the part of the performers.

Yet no one seemed greatly to mind. The actors went on acting for their own amusement, lovers sat blissfully entwined in every direction, mothers called to babies, and babies called to mothers, and fathers sat on with that stolid air common to the male parent, who has grown accustomed to most things.

In the midst of it, a message came asking Edith to go behind the scenes and help with some particular final item, and as she stood up to go, she turned to Norman and Kitt: "It will be easier for me to slip home by the back way with Lionel and Chip. I'm sure you two have had enough. Why not go on ahead now? If you wouldn't mind, Kitt, we'd love to find hot cocoa waiting for us."

Hesitation was immediately noticeable in Kitt's manner, but Norman saw his opportunity.

"Why, yes, of course we'll go on and get it ready for you. If there's one useful thing I *can* do, it's to make cocoa."

A minute later Kitt found herself out in the street alone with him in a silver moonlight that made the whole world beautiful.

CHAPTER XVI.

NORMAN MAKES COCOA.

THERE was a short cut home, but Kitt did not feel sure of her bearings in the light of moon and stars only, so she was reluctantly obliged to go round by the road. Norman observed both her doubt and her vexation, and he was glad that she was afraid to trust to her knowledge of the village side-paths. For even if she refused to be friendly, at least they were alone there together, in that wonderful silver world.

He looked into her face as they started off, and in the silvery light she was like some exquisite statue with dark, shining eyes.

"What a resolute little girl it is," he said in a winsome voice. "Quite determined, upon no consideration, to be friends ever more again with the odious man from the ship."

She made no answer, and he added, looking closely into her face: "Isn't that so, Kathleen?" and half under his breath he finished, "Mavourneen?"

She quickened her pace, and he laughed softly.

"Don't hurry so. I won't transgress more than I can help, and it's such a glorious night. Do you hate me very badly, Kathleen?"

"I have told you. Why rake it up again? Everything was ended, and all your absurd fuss proved unnecessary; why couldn't you leave it there? Why come here at all?"

"Has it been *proved* unnecessary?" He grew suddenly graver, and spoke with slight emphasis.

"Of course it has. I told you it would be."

"And so you had succeeded in forgetting? But I told you I didn't want you to forget, Kathleen. I told you I didn't mean to let you forget."

"Well, you know what I said!" The small head was carried a trifle higher. She had never lacked spirit in any of their encounters, the little Donegal lass.

"Oh, yes! I know quite well what you said. It reminded me rather of a Biblical phrase about breathing out threatenings and slaughter. I don't know where the phrase comes in, but it is nice and vigorous. Still, I am entitled to my own view of things, whatever you say, am I not? And I have told you my view, with like vigour. I don't mean to let you go, you little, vigorous, denunciatory Irish girl. I like your vigour. And to-night, you are so beautiful, you make my head swim. I wish I could make you stand still, and let me look at you, as if you were a picture, for half an hour."

She stumbled over a big stone, and he reached out and caught her. His slim, strong hand closed on her arm, and something in his grip made her vaguely afraid. No vacillating, uncertain grip this! The hand of a man who could win and hold! She saw his face in the clear moonlight also—the firm, finely moulded mouth and chin, the keen, unfaltering eyes.

But these very attributes of power only urged her to greater efforts to escape him. There was an element of the wild, untamed, woodland creature in her, which her life in Donegal had fostered unchecked. Where she suspected coercion she was instantly on her guard, instantly full of resistance. Only the wariest hunter would get her into his net.

"I would rather you didn't hold my arm," she said, and stood still.

His clasp tightened a moment. When she spoke and looked like that, she roused a devil of masterfulness in him, that he could scarcely hold in check. She saw his face grow white and strained. Her own was like carved marble.

"I am not hurting your arm. Mayn't I give you a little ordinary help when you stumble?"

His face was very near to hers, and she saw the

masterfulness in it. In some strange way it thrilled her. She felt her breath coming unevenly, while something that alarmed, and puzzled, and thrilled, seemed to be making havoc in her mind. Then, her natural fighting instinct reasserted itself.

"You are not hurting my arm"—coldly—"but you are hurting me in another way—or at any rate you are vexing me. Why must you always do that? What have I ever done to you?"

"What have you ever done to me? Good God! What *haven't* you done? If your face makes my head swim, only to touch you makes me feel a complete stranger to myself. Am I, or am I not Norman Hamilton Lutterworth? Can one woman, just a little unsophisticated girl like you, take a man up and wring him bare of every attribute he rather prided himself upon and leave him just a tortured, quivering, aching framework of a man? Pshaw! the thing is absurd!"

He let go her arm, and strode forward, and for some paces they walked along in silence. Then he seemed to have regained his self-control, and his old, carefully-balanced equipoise.

"You'll wonder if I'm mad, Kathleen!" he laughed; "but you needn't be alarmed—or angry. It is only a pose. I like to tease you."

Kitt had her doubts, but she kept them to herself. That strange thrill had unnerved her a little in spite of her bravado. She wished they had reached the little frame-house.

But when they did reach it, she hardly knew if it were a relief or not. To be alone in the kitchen together, getting cups and saucers to fill with cocoa, was no more reassuring than the moonlight. She felt vaguely that the air was charged with electricity; and Norman's face was, if anything, whiter and more strained than ever, though he tried to banter her lightly.

"What an odd little house, isn't it? How cosy it feels. I rather like it. Mine's a big house, a perfectly absurdly big house, and I don't know that I was ever in the kitchen in my life. I would like to show it to you. I mean the house, not the kitchen. I can't imagine

anything at the moment more delicious than your veiled scorn. Every line of you would say—"Not bad! pretty fair! rather nice! but if you could see *my* home in Donegal!" He laughed lightly. "Well, anyhow, what's your house like, Kathleen? I suppose it has a roof of sorts, and some of the windows have a little glass in, and one or two of the floors are whole? You see, I know those Irish houses!"

She tried to look vexed, but a little smile struggled through in spite of her. She did not mind his banter, if only he would not make love.

"It lets the rain through pretty badly," she admitted, "and one or two windows have brown paper pasted on, because—well, because it always seems to be a Saint's day when we send for the plumber!" The smile widened.

"But, of course, you'd hate a mansion beside it, or even one of the finest old manor houses in England?"

"I expect so; but it isn't likely to make any difference either way. What are you going to do with that milk?"

"Boil it, of course. Don't you know how to make cocoa, you little Ignoramus? Why isn't it likely to make any difference, either way? I think it might make quite a lot of difference; but I don't see why you shouldn't get used to the mansion. It must be nicer *not* to have brown paper in the windows, and to have a roof that doesn't let the rain through."

"Oh, you get used to things!"—loftily.

She did not know whether he possessed a mansion or not, but she was not going to admit that a palace had any advantage over the ramshackle old place that was her home. "It's very airy, anyway."

"You can get the same effect by leaving the windows and doors open," he suggested.

He was sitting on the kitchen table, swinging one foot and watching her with humorous eyes, while she made a poor attempt to find some occupation that would keep the table between them. She was also a good deal exercised in her mind as to how she should produce her final *coup*—the subterfuge that was to free her from him for ever.

"Has Pat got a house?" he asked.

"Yes. And a farm."

"Oh! he's a farmer, is he? Will his farm grow anything? They won't all of them in Ireland!"

She did not vouchsafe him an answer, but rattled the plates in the cupboard instead.

"And does his roof let the rain through? And do his windows have to be covered with brown paper?"

She emerged from her cupboard, looking defiant.

"You are laughing at me."

"Not at *you*, dear."

"At my friends, which is worse."

"Is it? Then I apologise. You're such a fiery colleen; I seem as if I couldn't help transgressing."

"You don't want to: you don't try. You only care to tease and vex me."

"Can't you guess *why*?" He leaned towards her over the table, and his voice was wholly winning.

She stood flushing a little in the lamplight, and refused to look at him.

"It's only because you look so adorable when you are vexed. I've only read about people like you before, who are all thorns and rose leaves, and sunshine and showers, and rippling breezes, and dreadful thunder clouds mixed up. Now I've found a real one, and you are like a musical instrument that I must play upon."

Kitt let him run on. The time had come when she must make her statement, but it was difficult to know how to put it.

"If I had you in that house of mine, which has a whole roof on it, I should want to play on my musical instrument all day long—soft tunes, and sad tunes, and little gay tunes, and vigorous, rushing tunes like the wild west wind. Shall I tell you one thing of which I am absolutely certain? That no one in all the wide world could bring out quite such delicious music as I could. And that's not because I'm a musician. I'm not. I scarcely know any tune in existence except 'God Save the King'—and I can't always tell that from 'Rule, Britannia.' But there's just one chord in me that answers perfectly to one chord in you; and there-

fore I believe your life is in some mysterious way the complement of mine, and that alone can make the sweetest music. You didn't know I was a sentimental ass, did you? I didn't know it myself two months ago. And the odd thing is that I'm not a bit annoyed, or ashamed of it. I rather like it. When I was hunting, I used to dream every night under the stars like the veriest love-sick stripling. Well, as I didn't do it when I was a stripling, I'm rather glad to do it now. It would have been a pity never to do it at all. Kathleen, when are you going to be kind? When are you going to let me have my own musical instrument? You can't escape me always. Give it up, and come now."

She turned and looked at him slowly, and there was no faltering in the deep eyes, so like wells of violet-tinted night.

"I don't know what you mean by saying I cannot escape you. There is no question of escape."

"That isn't quite true, Kathleen." When she looked at him full and deep like that it seemed to go to his head. He could only take refuge in light persiflage. "I ought to call you my musical lyre! You know that I mean to marry you some day."

"You can't." Her gaze faltered, but her voice was quite firm. "I am going to marry some one else."

He sat upright suddenly. "What do you mean?"

"I have become engaged since I last saw you."

"To whom!" The question sounded almost like a pistol shot.

"To Lionel Hardcastle."

"To Lionel Hardcastle!" he cried in utter astonishment. "That boy who glared at me all through dinner to-night? You can't expect me to believe anything so ridiculous of a sensible woman like you."

She flushed angrily, and faced him without a tremor.

"You can believe it or not, as you choose. I don't care in the least what you think about it. I would have told you sooner, only you did not give me the chance. Anyhow, it is true. I *am* engaged to Lionel Hardcastle. You can go and ask him yourself."

"What about Pat?" he asked, still doubtful if he could have heard aright.

Her lips trembled a moment, but she steadied them and said: "Pat will be glad for me to be happy."

"Happy!" The scorn in his voice was beyond description.

Then he got up and strode towards the door, through which they could see the silver, gleaming moonlight.

"Well, I'm damned!" he ejaculated.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PRIMITIVE WOOING.

WHEN Edith Hope came in with Chip and Lionel a few minutes later, she saw at once that there was constraint between Norman and Kitt ; for though Norman talked more, if anything, than before, and was even more amusing in his remarks about the evening's entertainment, she saw that his face was very white and set, and that there was something of a glitter in his eyes. Kitt, likewise, was more mirthful than usual ; but she pointedly addressed all her quips to Lionel, and almost showered attentions upon him. Which attentions sent poor Lionel home to bed in a condition bordering on frenzied joy.

That Kitt could seriously prefer Lionel, dear boy though he was, to such a man as Norman Lutterworth, was unthinkable ; so Edith could only suppose that they had had a disagreement, and that Kitt was trying to punish him. Norman's admiration of Kitt was patent to every one, but of course Edith knew nothing whatever about him, or about their friendship, and could only fall back upon her own predisposition in his favour.

When at last the cocoa was finished, and he rose to depart, she was a little surprised to observe him go up to Kitt, and say quite distinctly, in a voice that held a note almost of authority : " Will you come for a walk with me to-morrow morning ? "

" There is nowhere to walk to in Kneller," Kitt answered, in that airy way of hers, " except along the railroad, and that is so dangerous."

"I think I can take care of you," said Norman pointedly. Lionel looked up, and seemed about to say something, but a glance from Kitt quelled him.

"We are very busy in the mornings here," she said.

Norman turned to Edith quite frankly.

"Can you spare her to-morrow morning, Mrs. Hope? I shall only be able to stay a day, and I should like a chat before I go on to England."

"Of course she can go," put in the ubiquitous Chip.

"Kitt is only mighty-tighty. I'd come in a moment if you asked me."

"What about school?" Norman inquired, laughing.

"Oh, school!"—with fine scorn. "I should always play truant if it was worth while."

"Mr. Lutterworth will think you are a very forward little girl, Chip," her mother admonished, and added: "I'm sure Kitt would like to go with you in the morning."

Lionel again looked about to speak, and was once more silenced by a look from Kitt.

"I'll come, if you are so set on it," said Kitt carelessly. Then she manœuvred so that she had a few words with Lionel in the kitchen before the party broke up.

"I hate the man," the boy declared hotly. "What is he here for at all? Anyone can see he is in love with you."

"Oh, nonsense!" Kitt told him. "I scarcely know him at all. I never saw him in my life until we met on the ship, and we scarcely spoke to each other all the way over. But, Lionel,"—sternly—"you are not to give our secret away to Aunt Edith. You nearly did to-night, and I should have been very angry. It is only make-believe, you know."

"Will you tell this Lutterworth man as if it were real?" he urged.

"Perhaps. Anyhow, he is going away to-morrow, or the next day, and I don't suppose I shall ever see him again. Now, will you be careful?"

He promised grudgingly, but saw she was resolute, and he could only give in. "It isn't make-believe that

"I worship you, Kitt," he told her. "You are everything that is perfect to me. Like an angel straight out of heaven."

"Don't be silly," said Kitt.

But when, later, she looked out of her bedroom window over the sleeping town, she wished frantically that she were safe out of the tangle, which only seemed to be growing—safe in Donegal with Pat.

The next morning Norman came for her, according to arrangement, and after a little talk with Edith over a glass of wine, they started out together along the railroad.

He was quiet to-day and rather grave. All night he had puzzled over the difficult situation, and in the morning had seen no clearer. If Kitt were seriously engaged to Lionel, he felt she must have made the compact in one of her impetuous fits, likely enough to thwart him. That she was in love with the youth was a probability not worth considering. No girl of Kitt's force of character would quickly fall in love with a weak-faced though charming boy. Besides, she had been very candid about her fondness for Pat. There he felt he had a rival. The new obstacle only puzzled him. It must have been the result of impetuosity. Yet how to save her from herself, whether she softened to him or not, baffled him. And all the time he never quite lost hope. Until she was actually married to some one else he believed he would never do that. Until a signed and sealed marriage contract divided them, he meant still to follow his quest.

As they walked along Kitt made no effort to sustain conversation. She had not wanted to come, she was there entirely against her will, and so she took refuge in silence, except when reply was necessary. The constraint of silence apparently troubled her very little. She remained merely cold and self-possessed. And again Norman could not choose but admire the will that refused absolutely to yield to his.

"Well, we never bothered about preliminaries on the ship," he said at last, "so it doesn't seem worth while to begin now. Of course, I want to talk to you

about this engagement of yours. Does it really exist? I see you are not wearing a ring."

"Certainly it exists. But Lionel's position is rather poor at present, so we haven't made it public yet."

"And when is it likely to improve?" There was a sneer about his lips that put Kitt instantly on her mettle and did much to defeat his purpose. The despot was showing through again; the pampered, spoiled favourite of fortune was "up against" an obstacle that irritated his self-esteem.

"I daresay my uncle will soon help him on. He is very fond of him, and has a lot of influence."

Kitt chose her words carefully, intending to give the impression that this engagement of hers was known and sanctioned by her uncle and aunt. At the moment she was cleverer than Norman, for he immediately received the impression without questioning it.

"All the same, it is likely to be a long engagement?" he suggested.

"It may, or may not." Kitt kept her eyes straight ahead. A mischievous spirit had taken possession of her, and though it was neither high-minded nor very creditable in the heroine of a novel, she felt she was getting a little of her own back. Since Lionel was not present to be misled, she saw no harm in banishing all suggestion entirely of make-believe.

"I see you don't mean to discuss the matter," he said, a little bitterly.

"Why should I discuss it?" she retorted.

"Oh, there's no reason at all—except——" He paused, as if to choose his words. "I suppose you haven't quite forgotten what happened at Montreal?"

"I have when you are not present. You won't let me forget."

They walked on a little in silence, and then he said:

"I am absolutely persuaded of one thing—you must not think of getting married without relating the whole story to your future husband. He has a right to know, and it is a safeguard for yourself."

She flushed swiftly, and glanced away with a disdainful expression.

"I suppose you are thinking again that I am making an absurd fuss; but you must remember I am much older than you, and perhaps a little wiser. Also, I have only your welfare at heart in the matter. I wonder if you have been wise enough even to tell your aunt?"

"I see no reason to tell her"—coldly.

"Then, obviously, you have not. It is a mistake, Kathleen. That unfortunate episode contains the germ of a burden that may be too heavy for you to support alone. I strongly advise you to tell your aunt, as well as your fiancé, since you seem determined not to let me help you to bear it."

"There is nothing to bear."

"Not now, and I'm sure I most earnestly hope there never will be. But one must face facts. The Westminster is a large hotel, and there were people there from all parts of the world. It is unlikely that anyone in the hotel that night did not know the next day that you were in the room where I upset a lamp at midnight. Wherever it was talked about, and it must have been discussed by all the visitors, the circumstances would be accepted quite naturally, unless it afterwards transpired that you were Miss Fitzgerald. In that case, it will tax anyone to guard your good name with absolute security, and it may easily create an *impasse* from which you cannot free yourself. Imagine the story coming suddenly, and with a totally wrong construction, to the ears of anyone who knew you, if you were not at hand to explain!"

"Surely anyone who *knew* me would not require anything explained?" she said haughtily.

There was an anxious pucker on his forehead.

"As I think you know, I admire your spirit tremendously; I always have admired it. But bravado may so easily be carried too far. Surely, you propose, of your own free will, to tell Lionel Hardcastle?"

"In time, perhaps. There is no hurry."

"I see you are obdurate. I wish I could influence you more. Anyhow, tell your aunt at once. She is a very sensible woman. Will you promise to do that?"

"I have told you I do not see any need."

"And you will not let me see the need for you! Ah, Kathleen—it is only you I am thinking about. I must go back to England now, and if any difficulty arose I should not be at hand to help you. I should be glad to think that your aunt knew. Best of all, I wish to God I could take you back as my wife, for I have an ineradicable feeling that it is only together we can defy Fate."

She remained silent, and they walked on without speaking. Then he stood still where a little clearing in the trees revealed a mound, from which they could obtain a lovely view of Lake Superior without the need of being constantly on the alert for a possible train. He moved towards it, and she could but follow, though she did so with evident reluctance. When they reached it, instead of looking at the lake he leaned back against a tree and looked at her. Kitt kept her eyes on the lake, and waited. At last he spoke.

"I don't mind admitting that your engagement is a jar, Kathleen; but it doesn't take the wind out of my sails altogether. I'll have to draw them in and tack a little, that's all. Until you are some one else's signed and sealed property, I choose to consider that I still have a claim that justifies me in watching over your interests as if they were my own; your interests and other things as well. Before I go back to England, leaving you behind, I feel I would like to tell you that I have a great deal to thank you for. You have almost revolutionised my world." He broke off with a little whimsical smile. "On the home voyage I shall miss you badly in my own particular bit of sunshine."

And still she remained silent, gazing out over the Lake. He wondered what was in her thoughts, and if it were possible that Lionel filled her mind. If he could only have known it, she had almost forgotten Lionel's existence. Across the far blue waters she looked upon a vision of her own beloved land, and all her heart was full of a yearning for Pat. If only she could once get to him all would come right. Him she would instantly tell, only too readily, of the misfortune that befell her that first night on Canadian soil; and, of course, he would laugh with her over Norman's

fussiness, and in his love and confidence she would be safe for ever more. But in the meantime there were yet some months to run, and even after Norman had been successfully got rid of, there would still be Lionel to cope with.

After a silence lasting some minutes he spoke again.

"Child!" he said gently. "I'm rather uneasy about you."

She was too generous by nature not to perceive the absolute sincerity of his concern, and to be touched by it.

"I am sure you need not be. You have seen what an out-of-the-way place Kneller is, and when I leave here I go back to Donegal." If he had not been so engrossed in the problem of how to save her from her own confiding nature he might there have discerned a sudden and total disregard of Lionel. Instead, his thoughts leapt forward to conjecture how soon he might reasonably hope to go and see her in Donegal.

"I shall be glad to feel that you won't think more hardly of me than you can help; and I hope you will sometimes answer a letter when I write."

She would not give him any promise, and he continued: "Most important of all, remember that if you are in any difficulty or trouble you have only to send me a message and I will come. I will come out here even if it is necessary. If I don't hear anything from you I probably shall come. I shall want to see for myself that things are going smoothly. You haven't the smallest idea, little girl, what a nightmare it is going to be to me, that through my stupid blundering your peace of mind has been imperilled. I am confident there will be no rest for me, unless I hear at intervals that everything is going all right. If you don't write I shall have to come and see for myself; so if you don't want the annoyance of my presence, you will write at regular intervals."

He would be going so soon now that she felt she dare give way to a kindlier spirit. Had not her subterfuge carried her triumphantly through? She could surely afford to be momentarily generous.

"It is good of you to care so much about me; but I'm sure you needn't worry. I would much rather you did not."

"Much as I want to please you in everything," he answered, "I'm afraid I must disregard your wishes there."

She turned to retrace their pathway to Kneller, and suddenly his old masterfulness surged upward again. A swift crying in his blood for her—for her love—for the right to protect her, swept aside much of his ordered, conventional being. He forgot that just because they were so entirely alone, and she had thus trusted herself with him, no gentleman might give rein to his fancy any more than as a prisoner he might break parole. The blood of many tyrannical forefathers was in his veins—men who had believed that might was right, men who had taken the thing they desired if they were strong enough. Gentlemen, according to the code of their day, they would have had little in common with his finer instincts. And then, of course, women were made to be won; and the daring, brigand way had successfully carried many a fair citadel. He stepped in front of her swiftly, and because of what she saw in his face she halted in doubt.

"Little girl, whether you like it or not, I'm going to kiss you before I go back to England."

His hand closed over hers in a sudden, resolute grip.

"There was a moment in Montreal when I nearly did, and was afraid. Ever since I have wished that I had. I'm not afraid now, because there doesn't seem anything left to me to lose."

She went deathly white, and there was smouldering fire in her eyes, but she only stood rigidly still.

Norman drew in his breath sharply. Then he did exactly the thing he had pictured. He pinned her arms down to her side and kissed her fiercely on the lips.

"There!" he said. "You can only go on hating me. You meant to in any case. *But you won't forget.* Do you hear, Kathleen?" giving her arm a little shake. "You are as cold as chiselled marble and smouldering

underneath with fury and indignation, but I think I have gained one point. No one ever kissed you like that before—this boy Lionel could not if he tried—he hasn't got it in him; therefore, come what will, you are bound to *remember*. Well, that is all I ask at the moment. To beg your forgiveness would be hypocritical. . . . Now we will go home. Unless you would like to hurl at me a few of those vigorous denunciatory speeches at which you are so adept?"

But she only looked away from him stonily. "I hadn't thought you were a coward," she said.

"And I'm not! If I were a coward, I should have been afraid of what *you* would say—or *I* would say—or *the world* would say. And I call you to bear witness that I was not."

"Do you also think you are a gentleman?"—scathingly.

"I don't know, and I'm afraid I don't greatly care. I'd sooner be quite sure I was a *man*, anyway. . . . I'm going to catch the train now, Kathleen. I've just time if we hurry. I feel too uncivilised to bother any more with conventionalities to-day. You've stirred something primitive, and it won't lie down again. . . . I'm going to jump straight into the express and head for England. But I'm glad I took those kisses. I shall be glad in my little private patch of sunlight on deck. You're angry now, and rightly, no doubt. But there will come a time—I know it quite well—when you won't hate the memory so much as you want to now. Probably every other man you know will have proved himself so perfectly mannered and discreet and self-contained that the thought of it will pall a little. I'm not any of those things. I'm just a resolute man who happens to care for you more than anything else in the world, and is somewhat rough and primitive in his wooing. But you won't always hate me because I loved you in primitive fashion. Perhaps the thing that will matter most in the end will be that my love was longer and stronger and more reliable than that of all the rest." He paused a moment, and then went on: "If I happened to have a strong castle handy I believe I'd carry you off and

shut you up in it, you little obstinate Irish girl. But, as it is, I'm going to shake the dust of Kneller from my feet as quickly as I can ; for I believe if I stayed to see that callow youth ogling you again with his silly, sentimental, pretty face, I'd commit murder. Anyhow, if it ever pleases you to do so, you can say in my defence that my disgraceful lapse from conventionality took place in a virgin forest, in a land scarcely civilised beyond its towns ; and perhaps a primeval taint from the ground under our very feet got into my blood." His hand closed suddenly over her arm, and once again that strange, disarming thrill shook her. "Are you going to hate me more than ever because I kissed you, Kathleen?" She felt his eyes looking through and through her—not masterful now, but with a tender light, and just a hint of sadness.

"I shall forget it with all the rest," she said, steadily.

"Oh, no, child! You won't do that. I'll wager my last shilling that even wilful, obstinate, determined Kathleen won't do that."

"You are always so sure of everything." She tossed her head a little as Chip might have done. "If you know all these things, why ask me?"

He let go her arm with a low laugh. "What a child it is! What a clever, unexpected child! If I were going to marry you, I should make up my mind to rule you with a rod of iron. . . and you'd twist me round your little finger! Come along. I mean to catch that train," and he hurried her away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE UBIQUITOUS "DRUMMER."

KITT found it a little difficult to explain to her aunt why Norman had gone off so quickly without coming to say good-bye to her. She grew rather confused over the explanation, and Edith placed her own construction upon the whole matter. "If he wants you to care for him, and you can't, it seems rather a pity, Kitt," she said simply. "I liked him very much."

Kitt felt inclined to explain that he was a selfish tyrant by nature, but decided it was much safer to say nothing. So instead of replying she went into the little kitchen to make some preparation for lunch.

When Chip came in from school there was a short and sharp wordy battle. The small girl burst into the kitchen with her round face ablaze with indignation and exclaimed:

"Mother says he's gone!"

"Who's gone?" asked Kitt nonchalantly.

"Why, Mr. Lutterworth, of course! You must have sent him away. He wouldn't have gone if you hadn't. He didn't mean to go last night. What have you said to him?"

Kitt could not help laughing at the indignant face.

"Don't laugh at me," snapped Chip. "When you're like that I hate you."

"Like what?" laughed Kitt still more.

"Don't! don't!" Chip stamped a small, agitated foot. "I feel as if I want to scratch your eyes out."

"You infuriated little demon!"

"Don't call me names. Who are you, anyway? Just a long, thin, gawky Irish thing! I wish you had stayed in your own home instead of coming to mine."

"You're not very polite," said Kitt; "but I don't know that I need expect politeness. Why are you so angry now?"

"Mr. Lutterworth would have come out with me this afternoon if you had not sent him away. I was going to take him to see the Lonely Lake. And now you've been rude to him, or something, and he couldn't stand it any longer."

"Well, take Lionel for a walk to the Lonely Lake instead. I'm sure he'll go if you ask him nicely."

"Lionel!" with withering scorn. "Who wants to go for a walk with Lionel?"

"I'm afraid you're very fickle, Miss Forsyth-Hope."

"That's my affair. You can have Lionel for yourself altogether. He never stops staring at you. I'm sick of it—and the silly things he says to you. I shall never like any man again unless he is exactly like Mr. Lutterworth," and genuine tears shone in her eyes. Kitt stared at her in astonishment.

"Why do you like Mr. Lutterworth so much?" she asked, curious in spite of herself.

"Because he's a real man," asserted the eternal feminine through a child's lips. For the thing that civilisation, and culture, and the Higher Education have never eradicated from the feminine nature is that sneaking admiration for the Brute, that willingness—nay, eagerness—to find the Man who is her Master.

Perhaps that was why during the long, tedious afternoon Kitt felt flatter than she had done any day since she came to Kneller. How odious the little ugly town appeared, with its monotonous frame-houses and corrugated iron! And the woods all round, crowding in upon them, like some dreadful visible doom of suffocation. Surely some morning they would all wake up to find that the forest had taken back its own, and that they were all fighting vainly to get free of branches and

undergrowth that laughed at their resistance, and slowly—slowly—wore them down. The encroaching woods had stood there for ages undisturbed by man, undisfigured by man's handiwork: what wonder, if in some sudden fit of righteous wrath, the trees leagued together and hurled themselves upon the little settlement? For a moment Kitt almost wished they would. The flatness of the petty, trifling, suffocating life they were forced to live was unendurable. And Donegal was so far away. Hundreds of miles of this dreadful forest stretched between her and her own loved home; was it possible that she could ever win her way back? In this cruel land, that continually drew exiles into its capacious bosom, and then mocked them mercilessly with dreams of a sweet, green, flower-decked English home, even Fate sided against the untutored, unsophisticated, harmless Stranger. Why should it have happened to her, of all people—that vexatious episode at Montreal? Would she ever—*ever*—free herself from it again? Oh, let the trees come and take back their own again, and wipe out the odious little town as if it were a sketch on a slate! Surely, as a spirit, she could then win back to Donegal!

And all the time her mood puzzled her. Why should everything be so flat to-day?—when she had won her great victory? By her clever little subterfuge, so adroitly arranged that even Lionel could not blame her, since he himself had suggested it, she had successfully sent Norman on his way, and freed herself from his unwelcome attentions. If she could cope with a man like Norman, she could surely manage a youth like Lionel; why worry about it any more? Why not feel just as placid and idly content as she had done before the letter came announcing Norman's visit?

The trees had not suffocated her then, and the grotesque collection of inhabitants in Kneller had thoroughly amused her. Why this restlessness now? Norman was speeding away to Montreal, knowing himself beaten; it was not likely he would worry her again.

But was he beaten?

She felt them again, those fierce, resolute kisses, and all her being was shaken with fury and wrath—mingled—dare it be said?—with a strange undercurrent of interest, that held and thrilled in spite of her efforts to crush it. Did many men kiss like that? Would Pat? Whether she chose to acknowledge it or not she knew that she would like Pat to. She knew that she would hate tame kisses. But would he. Pat was so lazy and indolent by nature. His warmest admirers could not possibly claim energy for him; unless it was in the skill with which he kept afloat the old sailing boat that really ought to have gone to the bottom long ago.

Of course, if Pat had had any real energy, he would have bustled around a little and made his farm pay and bought a new boat. But he was much too Irish for that. It was far less trouble to expend himself and needlessly risk both his life and Kitt's, in keeping the old tub going as long as it would. Kitt had not seen these things when she lazed and laughed, and dreamed through the days with him; but Canada was teaching her much. Perhaps it was rather a pity Pat did not bestir himself a little and make his farm pay. Of course, the money was of no consequence—no true Irish woman would be so silly as to bother about money—but Kitt realised it was rather more manly to do something with one's life. At the present rate Pat would dream himself into old age, and never know he was old until he fell to pieces like the inevitable end of the old sailing boat. She told herself that she must try and rouse him when she got back. Must take a little inspiration away in her baggage, to inoculate the dreamer with some of the splendid energy that was carrying Canada by leaps and bounds from a pathless wilderness to a great nation.

Then the truant thought stole back. If she thoroughly roused him, would he become resolute and determined like Norman? Would he, perhaps, kiss her as if he were drawing her whole soul through her lips? as if he was putting his seal of ownership upon her for ever?

Of course, he had kissed her many times, though not so often of late. When her father died, and she was broken-hearted, he had kissed her; and when she came away to this distant land. But they had not been kisses in the least like Norman's. She began to feel glad that she had had to come away. It dawned on her that she and Pat had grown up too closely. The separation, she perceived, would have a wholesome effect. When she returned after her six months she would go back as something of a stranger, and then their love would grow to a deeper note. The dream was very sweet. For a little she forgot how dull and flat Kneller felt.

Then callers arrived: the stationmaster's wife, who had several times hidden from Indians in the early days; and Mrs. Hall, the clergyman's wife, who made use of the church pews as a larder; and Miss Knutsford, the only girl in Kneller who knew how to do her hair in a chignon, and who gave herself airs accordingly. A few seconds after each arrived, it transpired that they had seen the stranger at the entertainment. Of course, they had not called to ask about him, but, as they happened to be there, they were interested to know.

Edith Hope shielded Kitt from idle curiosity by implying that he was quite an old friend; and then they thought it was a pity such an old friend had not managed to stay a little longer. In Canada there is an extraordinary predilection for rocking-chairs, and as Edith Hope had gone with the prevailing fashion, she and her three guests all rocked themselves more or less gently as they talked. Kitt, from a little in the background, watched the four heads swaying backwards and forwards, and felt as if she could scream. For when the subject of Norman was worn threadbare, there was nothing left to talk about except Kneller; or, at any rate, nothing of interest to the three visitors, and for half an hour, with that perpetual rocking motion they talked hard of the petty affairs of the settlement. At last, tormented past endurance, she excused herself, and slipped out by the back door. Then she started

away for a quick walk down the railway line—not in the direction she had gone with Norman—and sought in hard exercise to work off her nervy condition. But she did not succeed very well, and the sight of Lionel hastening to meet her seemed almost the last straw.

That Lionel was extra-sentimental did not help matters. "Why—why," she asked herself hopelessly, "could he not have remained the gay, irresponsible, engaging youth he had been in the beginning?" His lovelorn condition was beginning to pall unendurably already, and there were perhaps three months of it ahead.

"You were a dear to send him away," he began, with adoration in every line of his face. "I could hardly believe it when I heard. It seemed too good to be true. I was meditating black murder in my heart, if he went on trying to annex you. He has saved his skin by bolting. Perhaps he thought I looked dangerous," and in his fond security he laughed happily.

There was scorn in Kitt's eyes that she could not banish so she kept them lowered.

"I don't think Mr. Lutterworth would ever be afraid of anyone, if that's what you mean. He went purely for reasons of his own."

Her tone caused Lionel's face to fall a little.

"Look here—you did tell him it was no good coming humbugging round you, didn't you? Because even if we are not openly engaged, it isn't likely I should stand it, is it?"

"We are not even secretly engaged. You asked me to make-believe."

"Still, it is almost the same thing, and in three months——"

"I don't know what I shall do in three months. Perhaps we shan't, either of us, want to be engaged then. You must not count on anything."

"Not want to be! Oh, I say! Why, I worship you, Kitt! If you failed me now I should shoot myself. I swear I should."

"Don't be silly! Only boys talk like that."

"You're very cross this evening, Kitt. I haven't offended you in anything, have I? I should be wretched if I thought I had. Do tell me! I think I am going to be wretched as it is."

"No, you haven't done anything. I am just tired."

"Then that wretch this morning tired you. I wish I could get at him, the slim-faced brute. He had better not show himself here again, that's all."

His bravado only tormented further her exhausted nerves, and she felt she could hardly endure him near her. And, again, all her being rose up in passionate protest at the trick Fate had played upon her. If there had been no need to shelter herself, she would never have encouraged him for a moment. And there would have been no need, if circumstances had not conspired against her that first night on Canadian soil. When they reached home Edith noticed at once how pale and weary she looked.

"You are over-tired Kitt, I think. Have you a headache?"

"Yes. I went out hoping the air would do it good, and it is worse. I think I'll go to bed."

"I should, dear. It is by far the wisest plan; I'll bring you a little light supper presently."

So Kitt dragged herself upstairs, refusing to see Lionel's imploring gaze; and hurried to get under the sheets that she might shut out all thought of him and every one else, except Pat. But she did not succeed very well. And when she fell asleep she dreamt she was running to the ends of the earth to escape Lionel; and Norman stood and laughed at her; and when she saw Pat, and called to him to help her to hide, he only looked the other way.

But next morning the sun shone brightly in at the window, and the inexhaustible hopefulness of youth reasserted itself, and she felt better able to cope with the tangle. When Lionel came in, as usual, after tea, she sought a few quiet moments with him, and told him with great candour that he must not presume on their compact of make-believe, and that his fulsome adoration only irritated her. The boy looked very

miserable and downcast for a time, but managed to cheer up before he left, and the day ended more happily.

After that, a peaceful month passed. Then winter came down upon them in a single night, shrouding all the world in white. Kneller in the summer offered few enough means of ingress or egress; in the winter none at all. There was no one to sweep roads or paths and even from their own front door Mr. Hope had to clear the snow himself. After a time tracks would be trampled, but in the beginning there was only clinging snow over the boot-tops. Little sledges, drawn by dogs, went about with provisions, but very few people ventured out, and a muffled silence seemed to descend upon the township. It was less tedious to the inhabitants at first, because the time of Christmas shopping had arrived. This would seem to be a paradox, as it has just been stated that no one went out of doors. But in Canadian backwoods towns, shops have no part in the scheme of Christmas shopping, though it is a tremendous business, involving hours and hours of anxious thought, that almost end in nervous breakdowns. For though it has the advantage of taking up no time in wandering from shop to shop, and viewing countless different articles, it possesses disadvantages peculiar to itself. It is mostly done sitting over the wood-stove, in a rocking-chair. You rock yourself gently, in the pleasant warmth, with a large stores' catalogue on your knee, and a paper and pencil in your hand, and you jot down what things you decide will make suitable presents for certain people to whom you wish to give presents.

This done, you heave a sigh of content, and congratulate the country upon its perfectly simple system of relieving you from the burden of that brain-racking, nerve-exhausting process—the buying of Christmas presents.

But a day or so later you change your mind about one or two of the items, and you take another look at the catalogue. And while you are looking through the pages for a different thing to give to A, an article catches your eye that appears more suitable for B than the one you had chosen, so you change B's gift as well,

and rearrange A's. Then, in the night, you wake up and wonder whether you were wise to change B's after all. In the end you decide you were not, and next morning you again rearrange the list, and hunt in the catalogue for the object you had originally chosen. While doing so, you come across the very thing you wanted all along for C, and immediately there are further alterations. A night or so later, you remember two other people who ought to have presents, and come to the conclusion that some one already on the list will have to have something less expensive to provide the extra money. This involves going through the entire order and considering the price of each item, and at the end you probably perceive that your list is thoroughly unsatisfactory, and in desperation you tear it up and begin all over again.

As the "present" lists are usually commenced at the end of November, by the second week in December many worn and weary brains have nearly succumbed. Chip became so irritable and bad-tempered that she said "damn" three times in one week. The third time, when her mother scolded her, and produced the missionary-box for the customary penny fine, she said:

"It ought not to count in catalogue time. What else do you expect me to say?"

"I expect you to behave like a little lady, and not like a boy in the street."

"How absurd!" declared Miss Forsyth-Hope. "Really, mother, you talk like a Sunday-school teacher! You can't want me to be anything so dull as a 'little lady'?"

Kitt had to turn away to hide a laugh, and Mrs. Hope took refuge in a pained silence, though she shook inwardly, and was relieved to see her promising daughter march out of the room.

But while the snow fell silently and steadily, shutting them in from day to day, and the catalogues were pored over and discussed, Kitt found Lionel slowly driving both herself and himself to desperation by the fulsome nature of his worship, which he seemed unable to control, and which she could not endure. In vain she and Edith

teased and rallied him, striving for his own sake to make him take a more manly tone in every way. His work at the office began to suffer to such an extent, indeed, that Mr. Hope complained bitterly, and was several times on the verge of uttering an ultimatum. Edith pleaded for him, and he was given another chance ; but it grew apparent that the state of affairs could not continue, and he would have to be transferred to another office.

This prospect depressed him miserably, and Mr. Hope tried to arrange it at once as the only chance to bring him to himself.

But in the meantime Fate once more intervened, bringing disaster in her train.

It happens often in the winter season that the mail trains from east to west are delayed for many hours. Sometimes the snow plough cannot clear the track fast enough. Sometimes slippery rails makes progress difficult for the most powerful engines. Sometimes a freight train gets into difficulties and blocks the line for hours. A block of eleven hours occurred a few miles from Kneller just before Christmas, and the west-bound express was compelled to remain in the station all day, the passengers betaking themselves to the hôtel. And by a strange coincidence, the Commercial Traveller was among them. Fate was very busy that day. First, Lionel ran in to see Kitt about a Christmas present for Chip, and found her very short-tempered with him, and inclined to quarrel. She had a letter in her hand, and Lionel, in a hot-headed manner, declared :

" I suppose you are so cross because you have a letter from that man Lutterworth. I daresay he is clever at saying things, and I'm sure he wouldn't hesitate to go behind my back and steal you if he could."

" Yes," said Kitt angrily, " it is from Mr. Lutterworth ; but there is no need for you to speak of him like that. No one could steal me from you, because I don't belong to you."

His brow clouded, and a sulky expression marred his handsome face.

" You have changed to me," he said. " I don't know

whether it is his fault or mine, but if you fail me I'll shoot myself."

"Oh, don't be so silly!" cried Kitt. "I'm going up to the church to decorate now. Will you help me to carry some evergreen?"

So they went out and up the street together, past the little hotel. And a man was standing in the window who stared hard when he saw Kitt, and made an exclamation under his breath.

A little later, on his way back, Lionel called in at the hotel out of curiosity to see what passengers from the delayed train were still there. And almost immediately he was seized upon by the "drummer," who was interested to hear of the little lady he had so offended with his train-sickness talk. Lionel was nothing loth to loiter for a chat. Any stranger was acceptable in those long winter days.

"I saw you go past a few minutes ago with a lady I had the pleasure of meeting in the train last October," said the traveller. "She and her husband came this way, and I travelled as far as Elkin with them."

Lionel looked mystified. "Who was I walking with?" he said. "I have only been out with Miss Fitzgerald this morning."

"You just went past, carrying some evergreens, and Mrs. Lutterworth was wearing a purple cap and scarf. Very pretty she looked, too. I never forget a face."

"But there must be some mistake," said Lionel; "that lady was not Mrs. Lutterworth."

"Not Mrs. Lutterworth! Why, I should know her anywhere. You don't see a face like that every day. Her husband is a clean-shaven, keen-faced man, about medium height. A little bit of the grandee about him; but nice to talk to—very nice."

Lionel suddenly gripped a chair-back. The description tallied exactly with the man who had lately been and gone.

"Why—why——" he stammered. "Do you say she is Mrs. Lutterworth? You see, I think there must be some mistake."

"Not at all. Why should there be? Didn't they tell you about the fire at Montreal? A very nasty business that. The whole hotel might have been burned down. Really rather a miracle it wasn't! There was a strike, you know, among the electricians, and no electric light that night. So every one had candles and lamps; and Lutterworth knocked his lamp over and set the bedroom on fire. There was an awful scare. We all rushed out in night attire, and helped with the fire apparatus. I was in a room close by and was among the first. And the poor little girl was standing by the bed, scared nearly out of her wits, and no wonder. Do you mean to say you never heard about it? Her husband bundled his coat round her, and we pushed her out into the passage, while we fought the flames."

Lionel had grown white as death.

"I think you have made a mistake," he insisted as naturally as he could. "It must have been another Mrs. Lutterworth."

The man laughed as if he thought it rather a good joke. "I don't know how many of them there are," he said coarsely; "but this is the one who was in Lutterworth's room that night. I not only helped her out but I helped to bring some of their baggage out. Both lots were in there together all right."

Lionel had a dreadful choking sensation in his throat, as if some one were trying to strangle him; and for a second or two he was quite unable to speak. The traveller noticed it, and indulged in further pleasantries of his own particular brand.

"Look here, I say, if it was just a game, don't let on that I gave it away. Odd she shouldn't have said anything about the fire. But, of course, if it was just a game, and they were amusing themselves, it was a damned awkward thing, wasn't it? Oh, lord?" and he began to laugh.

Lionel clenched his hands. In two minutes, he felt he must surely fly at the man's throat. The traveller noticed his strange look, and grew more serious.

"There's just a little mystery somewhere, that's all. I'm sorry if I've made trouble. Of course, she is Mrs.

Lutterworth. Why, we all came along in the train together, and I talked to both of them. She'll remember me if you mention train-sickness. I put my foot in it a good 'un. Didn't like my noticing it. He was a bit taciturn, too, but I liked him. I gave him a good tip about wheat. I wonder if he took it. What a pity I have to go! I should like to have seen them again. But time's up now—I must be off. Not Mrs. Lutterworth! that's rather good! Well, if she isn't, *she ought to be*, that's all I can say. Good-bye! Ask her about the train-sickness," and chuckling to himself, he went off to the station.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GREAT WHITE FROST.

LIONEL sat quite still, and where everything had been white before it seemed to grow red. Once he staggered to his feet with a blind idea of rushing after the stranger and throttling him. Even as he did so a bell clanged loudly and the West-bound express steamed out of the station. Then he sat down again, heavily. His brain seemed to reel. He wondered if he had gone mad. For he divined surely that whatever truth there was, or was not, in the story, there was undoubtedly a mystery. In his over-wrought condition he began to remember things in connection with Norman that he would not otherwise have imagined for a moment. The air with which he had asked her on the night of the entertainment to walk with him the next morning, evidently taking it for granted that she would not dare to refuse; the unusual amenity with which Kitt had given in and gone; then Norman's extraordinarily sudden departure; and Kitt's queer mood afterwards. Finally, the very letter of the morning was dragged in. Evidently Lutterworth had some hold over her, and that was why his letters upset her so. Yet how incredible and monstrous the whole story was! She could not be Lutterworth's wife, he reasoned, or he would not have left her there at Kneller. Then, if not his wife, what was she? What was the last sentence the stranger had lightly flung over his shoulder? "If she's not Mrs. Lutterworth, she ought to be—that's all I can say!" Ah! Why had he not sprung at him and strangled him with the infamous lying words in his

throat? He stared out over the snow, and the wildness of desperation crept into his eyes. What could be the meaning of the story about the fire? Why had Kitt never mentioned it? Of course, she would have done at once if there had not been something else behind. Then what *was* that something else?

His tortured mind tried to find a hundred answers, and only found itself up against a blank wall in the end. Then a ray of light gleamed.

It was not likely, having seen the girl at the hotel only in her nightdress, that the traveller could have so easily recognised her again. Ah! that was the loophole. Lutterworth, the cur, had had some one else with him. There was no doubt the man had observed him closely enough to remember, but not the girl he had helped to push out of the room.

Then suddenly blackness came down again.

There was the further tale about the train and the train-sickness. The man said he had talked to them both on the journey afterwards, that Lutterworth had been taciturn, and Kitt vexed because he asked after her train-sickness.

"Oh! What *did* it mean? What *could* it mean?"

There was nothing in their travelling together; but they must have known that the traveller took them to be husband and wife; and, obviously, they had not denied it.

"Then if she is not Mrs. Lutterworth, she ought to be—that's all I can say!"

How the hateful words echoed and re-echoed in his ears, driving him on and on in his desperation!

Why had they not denied it? Why was this stranger still left to suppose a relationship that did not exist? Had they been *afraid*? Was there something they were bound to hide? Was the mystery this dreadful thing the stranger more than hinted at?

Was Kitt? . . . No—no—it was too horrible—too impossible! He must be going stark, staring mad to suppose it for one moment. He staggered to his feet, feeling himself unsteady in every way. But in the afternoon he would see her. And then he must learn the

truth. He felt that his whole life depended upon it—his life, and all the faith of his life. Was he not bound up in her, body and soul? All he had or ever could have, all he was or ever could be, lay at her feet, whether she were kind or no.

He went back to the office because he could not touch food and knew not where else to go. A clerk, struck by the grey pallor of his face, asked him if he were ill. He smiled a smile that was almost a distortion, and said: "No, I'm quite well."

The hours dragged on until the time of his usual visit. He wondered if he would find Kitt alone. Probably he would, as Mrs. Hope would be at the church, with Chip helping her. He was glad of that, otherwise he might have had difficulty in getting her alone. Finally he went out. The cold was awful—thirty degrees below zero. It would probably be even lower at night.

At the house he found Kitt alone, as he had hoped. She had remained behind to do some cooking, and was in the kitchen. The others were all decorating, for Mr. Hope had come from a tour of inspection, and had gone with them. He walked into the light and warmth rather like a drunken man, and Kitt, too, exclaimed when she saw him:

"Are you ill, Lionel? What's the matter?"

"It's the cold," he said between clenched teeth, "this paralysing cold."

"But you've got a fur coat and cap and mittens. You ought not to feel it."

He turned his back to her while he threw them aside, and she went on beating up an egg. In her big overall, her cheeks flushed with the fire, she looked prettier than ever. His tortured soul noted every detail. Then he took up a position in the shadow, while she had the light full on her face.

And suddenly he said:

"Was there a fire in the hotel the night you were at Montreal?"

The attack came so unexpectedly that Kitt was staggered, and he saw her give a start and stop beating the egg.

Then, without looking up, she said :

"What a sudden question ! Why do you ask it ? " and went on beating. As she did so, she called all her wits together. There was no knowing what he might ask next.

"There was a man in the hotel to-day from the west-bound express. I don't know who he was, except that he was in the Montreal hotel when there was a fire in some one's room—and—and—— " The words choked him : he could not speak them.

Kitt's brain reeled. Who could it have been ? What had he said ?

"Well ? " She tried to speak naturally. "What else did he tell you ? "

"That you were Mrs. Lutterworth," he burst out, unable to endure the suspense.

"That I was Mrs. Lutterworth ! How ridiculous ! How perfectly absurd ! What was he like ? "

Her frank denial reassured him a little.

"He was a commercial traveller, I think. He saw you with me, and he said he had travelled in the train with you and Lutterworth, and a lot of other things. Something about train-sickness, I think."

Ah ! she had it now—the ubiquitous "drummer" ! But what a coil ! What a desperate, hopeless re-entanglement, just when things seemed straightening out. "You'd better tell me what else he said," she remarked, lowering her troubled eyes and trying to plan her best and wisest course of action.

"Then there *was* a fire ? " he questioned.

"Yes," came the slow admittance.

"But you never said anything about it ? " in a strained, puzzled voice.

"Not to you, perhaps," with a slight emphasis.

She meant him to conclude that she had told her aunt, now that she saw where the danger lay ; but she had not grasped how his mind was warped with his overpowering passion for herself, and he took it instead that she had not chosen to enlighten him.

"Why not to me ? " He leant forward suddenly. "Was there anything you were ashamed of ? "

An angry flush dyed her cheeks. She was still too unsophisticated. She would not see the incident in the eyes of those who did not know the truth.

"What do you mean? Of course, there was nothing to be ashamed of. I wonder you dare ask me such a question."

He threw out his hands with a hopeless gesture. "I feel I'd sooner die than believe that what that brute said was true."

"What did he say?" The danger glint was coming into Kitt's eyes again. Oh, for the wisdom of a few more years to steady the hot, impulsive temper!

"What did he say?" she repeated, resolutely, leaning across the table towards him. "You will have to tell me now."

Driven into a corner, Lionel repeated the fateful sentence. Through clenched teeth he muttered:

"That you and Lutterworth were—were—together and that if you were not Mrs. Lutterworth, you ought to be."

For a moment Kitt felt as if she had been struck in the face. Her blood boiled, and every vestige of caution and reason was thrown to the winds.

"The cur, the lying cur! How dare he? And you let him go? You didn't kill him? Ah! Pat would have killed him where he stood!"

"But he said that in the train you didn't deny you and Lutterworth were married. You knew he took you for Mrs. Lutterworth, and you let him think so. And—and—he himself, helped to put out the flames, and he saw—— Oh, my God, I think I'm going mad! What is a man to believe?"

"If you believe there was anything between Mr. Lutterworth and myself that I am ashamed of, you had better go out of the house this moment, and never let me set eyes on you again."

"I don't—you know I don't—I *won't believe it!*"—fiercely. "But, surely, you will explain what made him say such things. He was so certain—and he would not dare if—— Tell me what it all means, Kitt, and I will go after him and stuff his lies down his throat."

"It was nothing in the world but a stupid mistake. It might have happened to any one."

"Then—there was some ground——"

"Certainly not for his wicked insinuations. Really, I think it monstrous that you should even ask me. I don't want to hear any more about it."

Everything about her carried conviction, and yet—and yet—every detail was damning. Why had she said nothing about the fire before? What had there been between her and Lutterworth to give him that calm air of assurance, which, to his warped mind, now seemed possessive.

"Why didn't you tell him there had been a stupid mistake? Why did you let the man think you were married? He was so positive about it. He said he saw you in the room—and—and—Lutterworth was there, too. Was he?"

She took refuge in a disdainful silence. What right had he to question her? Moreover, the whole subject was so hateful to her. When Norman was successfully disposed of, she had felt so confident that it was the end. To have it dragged up again now was too maddening. Could she never get free of it?

But Lionel mistook her silence. How should he know what to think? The garbled account now in his mind merely mystified him beyond powers of reasoning. Because his whole world seemed to hang on a reply, he stood up with a set face, and urged his point. They could hear the voices of the others coming across the silence of the snow. Before they entered he must have his answer.

"Kitt," he said imploringly, "I only want you to say that Lutterworth and his things were not in your room that night. Then I can go after that blackguard, that liar, and have it out with him."

He waited for her answer, but she only stood in silence, with her mobile lips still disdainful.

"They are coming." His voice sounded as if choking. "Just say it was a lie, say that he wasn't there."

"It was not a lie. I have told you it was a stupid mistake."

"Then, he was——" His voice failed him, and his face grew ashen.

But she did not see it, for she was only thinking of herself, and her own vexation.

There was a moment's pulsing silence, and then he turned to the door. "It will be the end of me, I think," he muttered as he fumbled at the door-handle. She raised her eyes and opened her lips to speak, but the sound of the front door opening interrupted her, and in the second's pause he was gone. She took a step towards the door to call him back, but her youthful pride rose up in arms again and stayed her. "If he chooses to think hateful things of me, let him. He ought to know better," said the voice of her pride, and she went on with her cooking.

But out in the dreadful cold Lionel strode across the snow, unheeding whither he went. He felt that the four walls of a room would stifle him. Out under the stars there was breathing space. It would be time enough to go in when hunger and exhaustion had numbed his mind. Of course there was a mystery somewhere. What the stranger had said was a monstrous lie, with a half-truth behind it that made it the more deadly. Perhaps she would explain on the morrow. He would ask her again, after she had had time to think it over. But the fact remained that this man Lutterworth had some hold upon her. Why was he not at hand to refute the story? What could he, Lionel, or anyone, do without him? His feet bore him almost unconsciously to the railroad, the only track where one could walk in that white, frost-bound, snow-wrapped world. And, after a time, as he stumbled on, the cold, now nearly fifty degrees below zero, began slowly to numb him. Yet he pressed forward blindly, conscious only that he could not bear to return yet to those four suffocating walls. Then, at last, the numbness turned to apathy—the terrible, awful apathy of freezing.

* * * * *

They found his body the next morning, when the East-bound express came in and reported an object

seen dimly in the dark beside the line. Mr. Hope himself went out with the search party, for from the engine driver's description there was little doubt that the object had once been a living human being.

But when they found him they knew that he had been dead many hours before ever the train came past.

They knew that he had dropped to his last sleep in the arms of the great white frost.

But no one except Edith Hope and her husband ever knew that he went straight from Kitt to his death. Nor did anyone know that when she heard of his death she put her hands out before her in a frightened, groping way, and muttering, "It was my fault!" fell in a dead faint on the floor.

CHAPTER XX.

THE OLD ORDER.

IT was the strangest home-coming that Norman had ever known. The sleek horses and comfortable brougham that met him at the little station; the footman, muffled in fur, waiting on the platform, the obsequious stationmaster and porters, all respectfully smiling a welcome; the white-haired, fine-looking old coachman, to please whom he was still met by a carriage instead of a motor-car; all these old familiar things which he had known since he first came home from Eton on his holidays, seemed not to belong to him any longer, but to some old life he had left behind. Evidently, he had not left it behind. It was all there, exactly the same, and he, himself, fitted into the usual niche. Then was it the other life that was not real? That other life, with the ache and the emptiness in it for a disdainful Irish lass that would have none of him. He might also have persuaded himself that it was indeed so, if the ache and the emptiness had not still been there. Not that they were entirely new. He had known before that there seemed ever something wanting, some initiative that made life worth while.

But now there was no longer any doubt about it. Wise or foolish, reasonable or unreasonable, hopeful or hopeless, he wanted that Irish lass there, with all her faults, all her sweetnesses, and all her alluring beauty and charm.

In the great entrance-hall his mother was standing to greet him, flanked by a white-haired butler he could remember ever since he could remember anything,

and a young footman who looked a little nervous and was evidently new.

He kissed his mother warmly, perhaps more warmly than had ever been his wont, for a certain tinge of questioning anxiety in her face merged suddenly into relieved joy.

She knew, of course, that he had broken with Hester Strange, but knew little of the reason, or indeed anything except that her late husband's sister, Hester's mother, was furious. Well, Dora Strange had always been a grasping, designing woman, and Norman knew his own affairs best. But she had been a little anxious, until his kiss set her fears at rest.

Yet, as they sat over dinner, she was again mystified. There was a change in Norman that she did not understand. He was the same, yet not the same. For one thing, he talked more. Of old, he had not often taken the trouble to talk. She had been used to keep up a pointless conversation, chiefly to fill the silence, and he had grunted monosyllables now and then.

Even on the first night of a return from abroad, she did not remember that it had been very different. But to-night he met her half-way—nay, more, he actually took the initiative and, unasked, told her about his trip. She was pleased, but mystified. Her instinct told her that there was something behind. She was puzzled to know what. If he had been as of old, and said little but monosyllables, she would not have resented it. It was the thing she was accustomed to. His father had been the same before him. The men of the Lutterworth family always took a great deal for granted from their womenfolk. They were studiously polite; given naturally to an old-world courtesy in the way of opening and shutting doors, standing at table until the lady of the house was seated, standing again when she rose to leave, acknowledging her efforts to be entertaining by occasional grunts; but there they had been inclined to stop. No Lutterworth lady, at any rate of later years, had been the friend and companion of her lord; had neither gone about with him much, nor sat with him in his den, nor been taken into his

confidence. Perhaps it was a little the fault of the ladies themselves. Perhaps they had not tried to make themselves companionable to men, but been well content with the nursery, the household, the dressmaker, and the dignity of the position. In consequence, not much had been asked of them, except to uphold their dignity in a stately, well-dressed fashion. It was what Norman had seen from his boyhood upward. He remembered his father perfectly. He knew he was a clever, well-read, rather taciturn man, who treated his mother always with studious politeness, but rather as if she were a guest in the house or a kind of institution. Naturally, as a son instead of a husband, he had been a little freer and more intimate with her. She represented extra pocket-money, and could make things much jollier when he brought a boy friend home from school. But when the need for extra pocket-money had ceased, and he entertained his friends just as he wished, he began to slide naturally into the Lutterworth manner.

If he had married Hester Strange, history, in so far as one generation of Lutterworths was concerned, would doubtless have repeated itself. One more lady would have upheld the dignity of her position before the cold, approving eye of her lord, and that "lord" would have lived out his allotted span, polite but indifferent.

But under the veneer of custom, it would seem there had lurked in the present lord of the manor a wholly unlooked-for strain of poetry; a vague relationship to the dreamer and the visionary, who beholds afar off some vision of a good and a glory that might be, if one could but win it. A curious hark-back, perhaps, to a far-off Lutterworth, who, tradition said, had died fighting against fearful odds, to give King Charles a little longer to make his escape after a lost Royalist battle. And this same Lutterworth had a curious history. We refer to tradition again, according to which his mother had dearly loved a poet-dreamer of that time. And suddenly the poet died from a sword-thrust in the back, and the mother was never seen outside her own domain again; and the Lutterworth who was lord of the manor in those days, hated with an

undying hatred the comeliest heir who had ever awaited the family estates. It was from that ancestor Norman had inherited his finely moulded chin and straight nose, instead of the heavy jowl and somewhat high-bridged nose common to the Lutterworth breed. And further back still, there was another ancestor who would seem to have bequeathed him a special legacy—a certain Sir Norman Lutterworth, said to have been with William on the historic occasion when the Conqueror rolled his future queen in the mud because she had looked disdainfully at him. Tradition had a good deal to say about that Lutterworth, from which one gathers that if he did not actually emulate his lord, and roll the lady of his fancy in the mud, he certainly lifted her up into his saddle one dark night and galloped away with her to his own particular stronghold, where he took such measures as were deemed correct in those days to bend her will to his.

Of these two ancestors Norman was obviously a curious blending, for the strain of the Lutterworth blood was handed on by the mother of the man who died for a lost cause—whether he inherited any from his father or no—for she and her husband were cousins. And that was perhaps why, at intervals, he went away on lonely expeditions into untrodden solitudes, leaving all pomp and circumstance gladly behind him; and why, when the vague vision which teased him became a concrete desire for just one woman in all the world, he could experience a love that was greater than life and stronger than death, and, at the same time, prove himself almost rough in his wooing.

And yet, because Eton and Oxford had laid their seal upon him, he sat at the head of his table in the stately dining-room, the perfectly groomed, immaculately dressed, self-possessed young lord of the manor.

At the usual moment his mother rose to retire to the drawing-room, and he held the door open for her; afterwards returning to drink his port and smoke his cigar in solitude. Yet it was not the solitude of old, for a dream and an ache kept him company. And in that he had cause to be thankful, for how much better

is the steadiest ache, than that apathy of the soul, which says "There is nothing worth living for"? To the emptiest life a dream may impart richness. It is not pain that we should fear, in short passage from one Eternity to another; not storm and stress, nor the need for buckled-on sword and armour shining from use; but, rather, absence of pain, when over-much ease dulls the armour and rusts the sword, and apathy descends upon the soul.

As for Norman he had his Quest.

In his unwavering readiness to pursue his dream, even though he spent himself in an already lost cause, he was true to the highest ideals of that poet-ancestor of his. If he had tried to forget, to destroy, to trample, because his love was unreciprocated, he would have been faithless to his better self. But he was not. Whatever the pain of the ache and the emptiness, he was willing to let it stay with him rather than forget.

The old butler fidgeted in the pantry behind the tall screen, wondering what on earth kept the master so long over his wine. Once he came in with an air of unconcern, then apologised respectfully and withdrew. From the preoccupied manner in which the solitary man glanced up at him, it was obvious that he was unaware how he was outstaying his usual time.

But at last, with the same preoccupied manner, he rose and went in search of his mother in the drawing-room. She had hardly known whether to expect him or not. On a first night of return he always joined her for a little while, but the clock ticked on, and it seemed he could not be coming.

Then at last he came. Again she looked up with that slightly puzzled, questioning expression, and again she saw something in his face that gave her only pleasure.

Standing on the rug, looking down at her, there was in his grey eyes, an affectionate expression that she had seldom seen there before.

"You had a nice trip, dear? It did you good? You look much better than when you started."

"The sport was not as good as usual, but—there were other things."

"Yes?" She wanted badly to ask him all about the affair concerning Hester Strange, but the Lutterworth men had not encouraged the ladies of the house to inquire into their private affairs, and custom had robbed her of initiative. It really seemed rather a pity that there should be any possibility of one of them missing the unusual condition of affairs that would arise should a young woman of Kitt's character reign in the high position.

But in this particular instance Mrs. Lutterworth need not have considered the point, for after a little Norman told her how he had been persuaded to agree to an open engagement with Hester on his return, and why, instead, he had wished everything between them at an end. He also told her of his desire to consider Hester a daughter of the house, and be enriched by the portion that would have gone to a sister if he had had one. She nodded her head, and seemed at a loss what to say. Norman had always been something of an enigma to her, and she was a little afraid of him.

"I don't quite understand, dear," she said hesitatingly, "why you wished the expected engagement ended."

"I could not marry one girl when I loved another," he answered simply.

"Then are you—are you—engaged to some one else now?" It was really somewhat puzzling.

"No. She won't have me." Norman rather enjoyed the effect of the statement on his mother. He had put it a little bluntly on purpose. She, dear lady, stared at him with unbelief in every line of her. Her son might be an enigma, but that anyone should refuse to marry him was too much even for a well-trained wife and mother to believe.

"Won't—won't have you!" She leaned forward. "Do you mean that she has refused?"

"Absolutely. She won't have anything whatever to do with me."

"But, my dear——" She could find no words to express herself further.

"Rather a jar, isn't it!" There was a momentary twinkle in his eyes. "Your one and only—lord of the manor, and heir to all the Lutterworths, not merely *refused*, but scornfully—witheringly—unbendingly—rejected!"

"You are joking, dear! You cannot expect me to believe such a thing."

"It is the absolute truth. And she is just a slip of a girl! I wish you could see her." His eyes grew soft, and there was sadness about his mouth. But to speak of her at all was a luxury, so he ran on a little. "But she's beautiful—at least, she can be. And she's very determined, and obstinate, and rather unforgiving. I made a mistake at the beginning, and she has hated me for it ever since. But I don't think she will—always." He was silent, gazing before him, his thoughts very far away.

"But *why* should she refuse you?" She still doubted her own ears.

"She doesn't like me. She said she hated me."

"My dear! She must be very odd."

"Odd because she doesn't love your one and only—eh?"

"Well, dear, considering what you are able to give her——"

"She doesn't care twopence about that. Mansions do not appeal to her in the very least. I almost wish we lived in a mud hut. She might condescend to glance at me then."

"I can't think she sounds a very suitable person for you to marry, dear," said Mrs. Lutterworth a little stiffly.

"Why? Because she doesn't like mansions, and money, and all that? But why should she? She has been as happy as the day is long in some old dilapidated house in Donegal. She told me herself some of the windows had brown paper pasted in them."

"Really, Norman! Is she—is she—an educated girl?"

"I'm afraid she hasn't much book-learning," and his lurking twinkle came back.

"But you can't be serious, dear? Is she a poor man's daughter? It would be a great shock to me if you married anyone who was not a lady."

"Yes, she is a poor man's daughter, or was—her father died lately. But she is a lady. He was an officer in the Royal Navy."

"And yet she is not educated?" She grew more bewildered.

"Not book-learned," he corrected.

Mrs. Lutterworth put down her work and looked up at him in a bewilderment she no longer sought to hide. "Are you joking all the time, Norman, or is there really some one?"

"No, I am not joking. It is all true. But I was teasing you a little, because you were so horrified at any mere girl daring to reject your only son. I ended the engagement with Hester because neither of us were the least in love with each other, and because I had met Kathleen Fitzgerald. Shall we leave it there, dear? Some day I hope to overcome Kathleen's aversion, and bring her here. If I do not succeed, we shall just stay on as we are to the end. I thought I would tell you about her, because of Hester. Aunt Dora appears to be very angry with me, but I don't see why she need be now Hester has expressed herself genuinely relieved."

"Dora is a worldly woman. She had set her heart on Hester reigning here."

"Whether Hester wished it or no?"

"Yes. Dora is a true Lutterworth," she affirmed with unconscious irony.

"Well, it is settled now; and I have Hester's frank acknowledgment that she is glad. Away from her mother, Hester would probably be a very attractive girl."

"I hope Dora will not try to make trouble. She is very vindictive when she is angry."

"I don't see how she can. What can she do? After all, it was only between Hester and me."

"I rather fancy Hester did not count at all."

"Not much. I am afraid. Poor little girl! In any case, I should have been a brute to marry her against her inclination, just to please her mother and provide myself with a wife."

He was silent for some moments, pondering on the person, who, in his shoes, had callously agreed three months before to what now presented itself almost as an outrage.

"Still, I meant to be good to her, and I daresay she would have found plenty of compensations," he concluded.

Mrs. Lutterworth made no comment. She was still feeling utterly puzzled and doubtful. She found it in her heart to wish that Norman had more closely resembled the only two other Lutterworth men she had known, men who were not given to sentiment of any description, and who looked upon marriage chiefly as a means to the desirable end of perpetuating their own particular family.

When he bent to say good night to her, she did not seek to stay him. She kissed him, murmuring—"I only want you to be happy, dear," but her tone suggested that she had no great hope of it.

Norman, inwardly a little amused, touched her forehead with his lips, and went away to his own den.

A bright fire was burning in the big hearth, and as he closed the door behind him he was conscious of a glow of content that the interview was over, and he could shut himself up with his thoughts in his beloved sanctum—a large, comfortable room, opening on to the wide terrace above the tennis lawns, where he kept all his treasures in the way of books and sporting trophies. Horns adorned the walls; skins lay about on the floor; a large writing-desk, usually littered with letters and papers, stood near the sunniest window; wide, deep, comfortable arm-chairs invited repose by the fire. On one side handsome bookcases contained all his favourite books, glowing with a homely, friendly appearance of welcome in the firelight. Old sporting prints decorated portions of the walls, varied with a

brush or two, as well as the horns. There was, perhaps, a striking absence of feminine photographs, or even the pictures of fair ladies so often decorating a young man's den; but this was merely because they did not happen to appeal to Norman's particular taste and not from any prudery. Still, on that first evening of his return, he was glad that he could conjure up Kitt's presence, almost as the one and only woman who had ever been in his den.

For he did conjure her up immediately.

He sank into one of the big, inviting chairs, and in his imagination he saw the dark head resting against the red morocco of the chair next to him. And her slender white throat was gleaming in the firelight, while one foot reached carelessly to the warmth, and one dear hand hung over the arm of the chair, near enough for him to touch it whenever he wanted to. And he was smoking one of his favourite pipes, lounging lazily in his chair, while he watched her for the sheer joy of watching, and told her lazily of something he had been doing that day.

And sometimes neither of them talked at all, sitting there in the firelight, because there was between them that perfect communion of hearts which makes mere words unnecessary. As long as they were there together, shut away from the world in their own "desired haven," what use was there in talking for talking's sake?

The dream was passing sweet. He awoke from it with a start, and passed his hand across his eyes to shut out the staring emptiness of the other chair—the only Lutterworth perhaps of all his race to find his treasured den empty for lack of just one woman.

He got up and walked to the window to look out at the stars in the velvet heavens, at the moonlight throwing a silver radiance over the glorious old trees in the park. And he prayed in his heart that some day a slim, dark-haired lassie, with shadowy Irish eyes and wonderful colouring, might stand at that window with him to look on the wonderful night, or roam under the old trees to watch the deer.

But would she?

A wave of despondency seized him. She did not want him or his park—would not come to him—would probably marry the pretty youth Lionel—or the idle, penniless Pat.

And if she did, what would she not lose of the wonder that might have been hers? What rare and beautiful seeds in herself might never bear fruit? Norman was not vain. It was not vanity that lay behind his thought. But he was conscious intensely of that vague power in himself which could call to the best in her, as perhaps no other man could. Had he not told her that she was as a musical instrument, and that none but he might draw forth its true sweetness? Could any woman come into a man's life and change it as she had changed his and yet not belong to him, not be willing to drink of the nectar the gods offered them?

He stood silently, motionlessly, gazing over the deep, shadowy glades of the park, and through his mind passed scraps of verses from a poem he had read and re-read for the beauty of its imagery and the splendour of its passion—only now to feel its real depth for the first time.

"There will no man do for your sake, I think
What I would have done for the least word said.
I had wrung life dry for your lips to drink,
Broken it up for your daily bread:
Body for body and blood for blood,
As the flow of the full sea risen to flood
That yearns and trembles before it sink,
I had given, and lain down for you, glad and dead.

* * * * *

Yea, hope at highest and all her fruit,
And time at fullest and all his dower,
I had given you surely, and life to boot,
Were we once made one for a single hour.

* * * * *

To have died if you cared I should die for you, cling
To my life if you bade me, played my part
As it pleased you—these were the thoughts that sting.
The dreams that smote with a keener dart
Than shafts of love or arrows of death."

He turned away from the window, and came back into the room, conscious of a vague impatience with himself for allowing despondency so to take possession of him. He stood for a moment and looked into the fire.

"You little Irish girl," he said, with the old ring of resolve coming back into his voice, mingled with the new tenderness, "while you are unfettered I will not give you up. The faith that can move mountains shall aid me. The love that is stronger than all things shall bring you to my arms."

He took a sheet of paper and sat down to write her.

"You little Irish girl," he wrote:—

"You probably think because an ocean and vast forests, and tall cliffs, and a few things of that sort stretch between us, that you are free of me, and that I shall leave you in peace. And you are wrong—quite wrong. Love cares nothing for oceans, or mountains, or forests. When Love has a Quest, it follows that Quest, and relinquishes it only for Death or Dishonour. I did not know this three months ago. I know it to-day because you have taught me. It is the first evening of my return, and everything here is the same, and yet everything is different. A wizard has waved a wand—were you the wizard? And desert places have blossomed into flower.

"To-night I lured you into my den. Out of the shadows of memory I called you, and you came and sat in the big chair next to mine. We just sat there, you and I, and somewhere, far, far away there was a world—somewhere a universe. It did not matter to us. We had each other. We did not talk much. I only wanted to look at you. You, like a contented kitten, only wanted to look at the fire. So we sat on—and somewhere a long way off, there was a universe.

"Then suddenly you got up and went. And all the room was empty—and my life.

"But I am writing this to tell you that you cannot stay away, and cannot escape me. You

belong here, by every law of love, and sooner or later you will come to stay.

"That is all I wanted to tell you.

"Come quickly, you little independent Irish girl, for neither world nor universe matter, nor heaven, nor earth, nor anything, while your chair is empty."

But he did not send his letter. He hid it away in a secret drawer. He said :

"I will give it to her when she comes to stay."

CHAPTER XXI.

A WOMAN'S MALICE.

MRS. LUTTERWORTH had been right indeed when she said that her sister-in-law was vindictive. Revenge might almost be said to be one of her ruling passions. If anyone hurt or annoyed her, she could not rest until she had retaliated. And in Norman's case, he had shattered one of the dearest dreams of her life. Her daughter was but a pawn. Her true end had been to get back to Lutterworth Manor herself, with a two-fold right—that of aunt and that of mother-in-law.

And now her dream was ruthlessly destroyed.

She could not make Norman stand to his word, because Hester had found enough strength of mind to admit her glad relief. She could only make the girl's life a misery to her, and set about finding a way to punish Norman. A breach of promise action was impossible—any publicity only recoiled upon herself and proclaimed her defeat; but there must be another way, and sooner or later she would find it. She turned the matter over in her mind day and night, seeking some weapon to have ready for the visit he was certain to make her when he came up to London. And the set of her hard mouth and the glint in her hard eyes must have given anxious fears to anyone who had a fondness for Norman. Every unpleasant trait in the family seemed to have congregated in Dora Strange, except that—and in this it is hard to forgive the devilment of fate—she was far handsomer than the usual run of the women. Because of her handsome face she could lure people on to the

rocks of her heartlessness and there break them. Her husband had gone under in five years.

A weak, amiable man at any time, her forceful character more or less frightened him into his grave. Yet many people, not having had any cause to find her out, were fond of her. Norman had always been friendly with her. Because it suited her plans, she had been exceedingly nice to him, and they had not been sufficiently together for any careless display to reveal her true character. He thought sometimes that she was a little unkind to Hester, but that only made him the more willing to take care of Hester himself when the time came for him to yield up his beloved liberty. The manner in which he finally had occasion to see her in her true colours was a little overwhelming. It was also based on an amazing coincidence. If the adage that truth is stranger than fiction were not a byword, one would hesitate to chronicle the circumstances that played into her hands.

It did not, however, occur until the spring. When Norman paid his duty call shortly after his return to England he saw only Hester. For reasons of her own his aunt chose to be invisible. So Norman had a *tête-à-tête* with Hester, who, seeing the added kindness in his face, was driven to unburden her soul to him about her mother's persecution.

Norman was astonished and perplexed, but he promised to help her, and left her comforted. A little later a pressing invitation for a long visit to Lutterworth Manor was daringly accepted by Hester, in spite of her mother's opposition. In the meantime Mrs. Strange kept her ingenuity awake, and bided her time.

And in the spring, with the return to England of a distant cousin of her husband's, who had been on a visit to her son in Canada, her opportunity came. This relative stayed a day or two with Mrs. Strange in London, and on the very first evening played unconsciously into Dora Strange's hands.

Something was said about Hester being on a long visit to Lutterworth Manor, and Mrs. Lee remarked:

"I was so surprised to find that Norman Lutterworth

was married. I always thought you had hopes that he and Hester would make a match."

"Norman Lutterworth married?" Then Dora Strange checked herself suddenly. Her quick brain scented a mystery. "Why, what do you know of him?"

"Well, it was a most curious coincidence! But you surely knew of the circumstances?"

"Not for certain," she answered with swift wariness. "Go on with your story!"

Mrs. Lee looked mystified, but the other woman's will dominated her, and she told what she knew.

"I stayed a week in Montreal on my way out, at the Westminster, and while I was there a fire broke out in one of the bedrooms very late at night. I did not hear much about it until the morning, because it was quickly smothered, and I was in another wing of the hotel. But the next day, to my amazement, I found the room had been occupied by a Mr. and Mrs. Norman Lutterworth, who had arrived on the boat from Liverpool the previous day. Of course, I never knew your nephew personally, though I have seen him several times, and I had Harry's sister visiting me the next day so I did not have an opportunity to speak to him. I saw him with his wife in the lounge for a moment, but when I got up to go and speak to him they had vanished."

Mrs. Strange could scarcely contain her feverish eagerness to hear more, but she managed to say quite naturally: "He was always very secret about his affairs, and we have not been told of his marriage at home, though we rather suspected something queer. What was the lady like?"

"Oh, quite a girl! Much younger than he. But very pretty. Quite unusual colouring. And tall. In a way, rather a striking girl altogether."

"Yes?" encouragingly.

"She was dressed in black, and looked unhappy which seemed so strange, as they must surely have been on their honeymoon."

"I suppose you would have known Norman if you saw him?"

"Oh, dear, yes. I've seen him several times. I

should have spoken to him at once, but I did not hear of his being there until the morning after the fire. The next day, when I inquired for him, they had both gone. Besides, I saw the name in the visitors' book—'Norman Lutterworth, Wandon, England.' "

" *Their* names, I suppose you mean ? "

" Well, no. I remember thinking it a little odd at the time. But it might easily have been an oversight : or possibly I did not observe very closely. There are such heaps of names. "

" Of course it may have been an oversight, " said Mrs. Strange vindictively. Then she added : " What makes you so sure the girl went by his name ? "

" Well, every one in the hotel knew that the fire had begun in Mr. and Mrs. Lutterworth's room. There was no question about it ; besides, they were both there. She was in bed, and nearly frightened out of her wits, I believe. He knocked a lamp over, and the oil caught alight. It was during the strike, and we had no electric light. "

Dora Strange leant back into shadow, and the lines of her mouth grew cruel. Then she gave a little laugh. " I don't want to take anyone's character away, but it is rather significant that the lady in his room was not apparently mentioned in the visitors' book, as having a right to be there. Or—possibly—it was *her* room. "

" My dear Dora ! "—in a shocked voice.

" Well, Helen, we all know what men are, and I certainly never imagined my nephew to be a saint, or better than the rest of them. " She shrugged her shoulders callously. " As for the girl ! " She shrugged her shoulders again. Then she gave a low, cruel laugh. " But the incident of the lamp is rather funny, isn't it ? I shall be able to chaff Norman a bit, when I see him. "

" Oh, please don't say anything if he hasn't told you himself. There may be many reasons for saying nothing at present. I wouldn't have told you a word, if I had not supposed he was married, and that you knew all about it. Don't say anything, Dora. Promise me you won't ! "

"Oh, well, I won't say much," she conceded in a conciliatory voice. "Only just have a little bit of fun with him, perhaps."

"I think you should not do that even. I wish so much I had not said anything. Perhaps the hotel people made a mistake, and he only ran in to put out the fire."

"But you said every one knew of them as Mr. and Mrs. Lutterworth?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I did"—helplessly. "But don't say anything, Dora. It really isn't your affair or mine; and if he is not married, after all——"

Mrs. Strange got up from her chair, and after putting Mrs. Lee's mind at rest, without committing herself to anything, she adroitly changed the subject, and no more was said of the incident.

But the next day she drove to the London office of the shipping company, and under one pretext and another, gathered certain information concerning the passenger-list for that particular voyage when Norman and Kitt had journeyed out together. Having gone through the list, she hit upon Miss Fitzgerald as the only single lady travelling alone, and laid her plans for revenge.

Her next move was a cable to the Westminster Hotel to know if Mr. and Mrs. Lutterworth had stayed there on the night of September the twenty-ninth, the date she had ascertained that Norman's ship arrived.

A guarded reply came to the effect that the names were not in the register. She tried again, mentioning the fire, and the reply came back in the affirmative.

Feeling confident of her ground, she ascertained from Hester a date when Norman would be away from home, and invited herself on a few days' visit. The first evening, as soon as Hester had gone to bed, she unburdened herself to Norman's mother upon the *mésalliance* he had either already made, or else was about to make.

Poor Mrs. Lutterworth, remembering how odd she had thought the object of Norman's affection, even from his own account, dissolved into tears, and lamentation, and wringing of hands. What was to be done? Dora

Strange was so sure of her facts that it was impossible for a woman, easily talked over at any time, to gainsay her. Mrs. Lutterworth's efforts to stand by Norman's integrity, were met with merciless logic.

"My dear Muriel, there are only two conclusions possible. Either he has married a girl he is ashamed of, or he wishes to marry a girl who is not a fit person to bring to Lutterworth Manor under any circumstances. I suppose, if the marriage is an accomplished fact, you can only thank goodness he has not asked you to have her here. If it is not, we ought to do all we can to prevent it, for the sake of the family. I thought I ought to tell you at once. You are his mother, and you must try to find out the truth. If he chooses to deny everything, I can confront him with Mrs. Lee, who actually saw them together at the Westminster Hotel. Has he told you anything about this girl he professes to be in love with?"

"Only that she will not marry him; but I am afraid, from his description, that she is rather strange."

"Did he mention her name?"

"Yes. Fitzgerald—Kathleen Fitzgerald, I think."

"I thought so"—triumphantly. "There was a Miss Fitzgerald went out on the same ship with him. My dear Muriel, if you come to think of it, they couldn't very well have been married. They only arrived in Montreal that afternoon. If what he says is true, and she *won't* marry him, it can only mean that she prefers the life she has evidently been leading. It is a most dreadful affair altogether. I will find out who this Miss Fitzgerald is, if I can, and whether she returned to England with him. For goodness' sake, don't weep! That won't help anyone! Pull yourself together, and save him from this woman if you can. He will probably listen to you. Really, now that I have heard this about him, I am thankful Hester was so decided in her dislike, and that we knew in time what he was."

Mrs. Lutterworth again made a futile effort to defend her son, but she was no match for a woman like Dora Strange, and could only fall back upon weak lamentation. For two more days she had to endure her sister-in-law's

merciless tongue, and then, having done all the harm she could for the time being, Mrs. Strange returned to London to await events.

When Norman returned home, he found his mother almost ill with worry, and Hester regarding him askance with troubled eyes. He perceived at once that something was wrong, and, in the drawing-room after dinner, asked his mother what had happened.

"Your Aunt Dora has been here," she began nervously. "I think I had better come into the smoke-room and tell you what she said."

Norman's face set a little grimly. Whatever it was, evidently his aunt's visit had borne no good will for him.

"Come along," he said, and opened the door for her to pass out.

In his den he pulled a cosy chair up to the fire for her, but Mrs. Lutterworth felt the gravity of the matter had nothing in common with cosy chairs, and took a high-backed oak one instead.

Then in faltering words she poured out the story, and finished up on the brink of tears with: "And so, dear, Dora is quite certain that you have either married some one you are ashamed of, or else that this Miss Fitzgerald is not a fit person to bring to this house."

Norman was not a man ever to use bad language before a lady, but he walked away to the window, and under his breath he consigned his Aunt Dora to depths unnameable. Then he returned to the hearth, and though his face was still white with anger, he managed to speak calmly.

"I see I must tell you the whole story, mother. It is a pity it has been proved necessary; but if Aunt Dora is trying to revenge herself through it, you will have to help me."

She looked up at him hopefully, and in a few sentences he told her exactly what had happened. But Mrs. Lutterworth was not tactful, and though she never for a moment doubted what he said, she tried his patience sorely by her comments.

"But what a dreadful thing!" she began, "what

a truly dreadful thing! The hotel people ought to be most severely censured. I hope you told them you should never stay there again."

"I did not tell them anything. It seemed at the time much wiser not to. But I begin to think now that I made a mistake."

"Do you mean to say you did not tell them what you thought of them?"

"My dear mother, can't you see that if they and other people in the hotel had chosen to disbelieve my explanation, it would have been worse than if no explanation had been given?"

"But how could you help explaining? My dear, it was too dreadful! Do you positively mean to say you did not find out until you were just getting into bed?"—and her face flushed with horror.

"That is what I said," he replied drily. "Need we discuss it further?"

"But really—really——" Words failed her. "What a shock you must have had!"

"Certainly, I was surprised," in the same dry tone: "That was how I came to overturn the lamp."

"I'm sure I don't wonder. But fancy if you had not overturned the lamp!"

"My dear mother,"—he was growing thoroughly exasperated—"if I had not overturned the lamp, it would have been all right. I could have demanded another room at once, and moved my things."

"Why, yes, of course you could. I had not thought of that, and probably Miss—Miss—Fitzgerald would not have wakened up at all!"

"She certainly would not if I could have helped it."

"And she would never have known anything about it! How odd it seems! But I really don't see why she shouldn't marry you, because of it."

"It is not because of it. It is simply and solely because she does not want to."

Mrs. Lutterworth perceived that Norman was growing extremely irritable, and stood up to go away and leave him.

"I'm very sorry about it all, dear; but no great

harm seems to have been done, and you will easily explain to Dora. I suppose you will go and see her?"

"To-morrow morning"—grimly.

"Yes, perhaps it would be as well. Good night, dear," and she stooped to kiss him.

Norman held the door open for her to go out, and then strode across the room, as if he could scarcely contain his wrath.

"No great harm done!" he repeated, "'and you will easily explain!' Oh, my God! I feel as if I could strangle Dora Strange! The whole thing is pure malice. She got a clue, and ferreted out the rest—and now she means to use it for all she is worth." Again he strode up and down the room, then came to a standstill beside the fire, and leaning his arms on the mantelpiece buried his face in them. "Oh, my little girl! how am I ever going to guard you from her? How can I ever stop her lying tongue? Kathleen! Kathleen!" he breathed, "for pity's sake, give way and come to me. Can't you see that I *must* have the right to protect you: that there will never be any peace for me in this world again, until I have you safe in my keeping?"

He straightened himself after a time, but his face was pale and anxious, and there were lines in it that had not been there three months ago. "Perhaps," he said, "I shall feel better when I have had it out with Aunt Dora to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ENEMY.

THE next morning Norman went away early to town, but though his face was keen and resolute, his heart was full of misgivings. A vindictive woman, actuated by malice—what chance had a mere man, and a little unsophisticated Irish girl against such? And his misgivings were not unfounded.

Dora Strange had been hurt, and she meant to hurt back. The fairness of the weapon—the question of *esprit de corps* towards one of her own sex—had no weight with her. Probably there was quite a simple explanation, she told herself; but she need not believe it unless she chose, and she most certainly should not choose.

When Norman appeared, she received him much as usual, though there was in her eye a gleam of triumph, which she endeavoured to hide. It was not her plan to let her vindictiveness appear: she knew she could hurt him far more by only seeming concerned.

"How are you, Norman? I thought perhaps you would come up. I suppose it is this unfortunate business about Mrs. Lee seeing you at Montreal?"

"It would be more correct to say the unfortunate construction you have been pleased to put upon the circumstances generally," he said in cold, even tones.

"I don't know what you mean." She met his eyes with insolent coolness. "I call it unfortunate because if Mrs. Lee had not seen you, the whole thing could have been hushed up so easily, supposing it had leaked out. For my part, you have my sympathy. It was just

sheer bad luck. Young men will be young men, whether their elders are shocked or not. But, of course, it might be awkward for this Miss Fitzgerald, whoever she is——”

“I have not come to ask for your sympathy, or your opinion.” His clear, incisive tones had a sharp edge on them. “I have come to tell you the whole story. As you told it to my mother, it is an infamous lie; and I believe you know it.”

“You believe I *know*! Really, Norman, considering you are the defaulter, you are taking rather an extraordinary line!”

“I am not the defaulter in the sense you mean. You have wilfully embroidered and misrepresented the whole story.”

“Not the defaulter! Oh, well! Of course I know we are not supposed to call it a fault in these broad-minded days! As for the story, I embroider nothing”——with a little laugh. “I *know* that you and this girl stayed at the Westminster Hotel on September the twenty-ninth as Mr. and Mrs. Lutterworth. Can you deny it?”

“I do not deny it. There is an explanation, and I have come here to-day to give it.”

“I believe there generally is,” she rejoined in slow, cutting tones.

“I suppose I can hardly expect you to credit it,” he replied bitterly, “having obviously decided, for reasons of your own, to stand by your own construction.”

“Not at all. Although, as I say, these things are winked at nowadays, my respect for you, Norman, would make me very glad to hear it was not true.”

“It is not true in the sense you take it.”

“I don’t know what you mean by the ‘sense I take it.’ I merely take the fact. I don’t see how there can be more than one sense.”

“Will you allow me to enlighten you?” he inquired sarcastically.

“I don’t like your tone, Norman, but I do not want to be unfair. If you wish me to hear this explanation, of course——” She shrugged her shoulders.

“I *intend* you to hear it,” resolutely. “The simple

facts are these: Owing to a good deal of flurry in the hotel, because of the electricians' strike, and the arrival of a big crowd from the boat, my request for rooms was not heard distinctly, and my things and Miss Fitzgerald's were put into one room. She was very tired, and probably crying, having lately lost her father, and did not notice the circumstance when she went to bed. I came in late from a music-hall, and in the dim light I did not notice it either. In my horror and amazement when I discovered what had happened, I overturned an oil lamp. The oil ran over the carpet in a blazing stream. In five minutes, half the people on the landing were in the room or crowding outside. You can imagine the rest. At the time it seemed wisest to allow it to be supposed that we were husband and wife. I had to act upon the spur of the moment—a very flurried moment, too—and I let the obvious conclusion pass. Afterwards it was too late to retract. When I saw what a coil we were in, I offered to marry Miss Fitzgerald the next morning. She absolutely refused to consider the proposition for a moment."

When he gave the explanation, Mrs. Strange listened in silence, but when he finished there was a scornfully amused expression on her handsome face.

"Very ingenious, Norman, I'm sure. I congratulate you, my dear. And it was nice of you to offer to do the straight thing. I hope Miss Fitzgerald is telling the same story, otherwise it might be awkward!"

"I will thank you to leave Miss Fitzgerald's name out," he flashed in low tones of concentrated fury.

"Well, that is a little difficult, in a story of this sort—unless, of course, I put another woman in."

Norman leaned across the table, with a white face and fierce eyes.

"I would like you to understand that I have great hopes of marrying Miss Fitzgerald before long. Under these circumstances, perhaps the less mud you throw at her the better."

"I have no wish to throw mud at anyone. I keep on telling you that I am disposed to take a most lenient view of the affair. But at the same time, Norman, as

a Lutterworth myself, I must protest against your considering anything so outrageous as bringing this lady into the family. It was my horror of such a possible climax that took me in haste to your mother."

"If you say one word damaging to Miss Fitzgerald's reputation, I will drag you before a law court to apologise," and she almost quailed before his eyes. But Dora Strange was far too clever to lose her temper, or to be quickly intimidated.

"That would hurt you far more than me," she answered coolly. "Just as if the British public would swallow a yarn like the one you have just told me! If she has any reputation at all worth bothering about, it would certainly be a mere shred at the end of the case."

"Not if she were my wife."

"Well, she isn't your wife—at least, we presume she isn't—and I don't suppose she will have any wish to come back to England when she knows the story is out."

"She is coming back very shortly."

"Not to Lutterworth Manor, I trust. Anyhow, please understand that I should prefer Hester not to meet her."

Norman could not trust himself to reply, so he got up and walked to the window, and stood staring across the square with hunted, ferocious eyes. Behind his back, his aunt allowed herself a little smile of triumphant gratification. After a time he wheeled round.

"You choose to treat the whole matter coarsely. I may as well do the same. You know perfectly well all your base insinuations are lies; but it pleases you to pretend otherwise. Well, what's your price?"

"Really, Norman," exclaimed his aunt in an indignant voice, "you are in an impossible mood. I have never been spoken to like this in my life. I don't know what you mean by 'my price'! I feel I ought to be very angry with you, but I can quite understand you feel upset about it all."

"I think you know perfectly well what I mean," he broke in cuttingly.

She was silent a moment, as if in meditation—then she aimed her last shaft.

“If you mean you will do something to please me, if I will never refer to the matter again, I can only think of one thing. As you know, Norman, I care a great deal about the family—it is bred in the bone with us Lutterworths—and it would be a terrible trouble to me if any one unworthy of the name reigned at Lutterworth Manor. You say you still meditate marrying this girl. Well, give her up, Norman. Just promise me that. It is too dreadful to think of a girl with a damaged reputation the mistress of Lutterworth.”

He came forward, breathing heavily between his teeth, and again Dora Strange almost quailed before his set face.

“You are a fiend,” he said, “and if you possess such a thing as a heart, it is as black as hell. How dare you try and ruin the reputation of an innocent girl—who never hurt you in her life—whom you don’t even know? But you will not succeed. Somehow I will find a way to prevent you.”

She turned away with mocking laughter on her lips. “Really, you quite frighten me, Norman! How tragically dramatic you are! And what dreadful language! If you were not evidently quite beside yourself, I should be seriously offended. As it is, perhaps we had better not say any more for the present.”

“It makes no difference now whether you say less or more. You have already said things I shall never forgive. I see clearly this is your revenge because you did not succeed in your scheme to marry Hester and me.”

“Nothing of the kind,” came the angry interjection. “I would rather see my child dead in her grave than the wife of a man who—who—does the things you do.”

“Now who is tragically dramatic?” he sneered. Then he shook himself with a vexed movement. “Why do we waste words in foolish recrimination? You have declared yourself my enemy. At least I know how we stand, and that is something. I do not know just what line I shall follow at present; but if I hear of you

spreading any tale damaging to Miss Fitzgerald, I will call you to account for it."

She stood up and faced him, throwing off some of her assumed manner.

"You can say what you like, Norman, but whether you bring this Fitzgerald girl to Lutterworth Manor as your wife or not, neither you, nor I, nor anyone else, can blot out the fact that she was at the Westminster Hotel, Montreal, as your wife, long before any marriage ceremony was read."

But he had grown calmer now, and he faced her without flinching.

"When Miss Fitzgerald gives me the right to guard her before all the world, I think I can see to it that even your malicious shafts miss their mark. In any case, I advise you to go carefully."

Then he strode out of the room and left her. But Dora Strange did not smile any more; she toyed restlessly with a book, and there was a scowl on her face. "Evidently he loves her," ran her thought, "and I did not think he had it in him. Whatever I do, I shall not hurt him very much, if he once wins this girl. I think I must find out some more about her."

Out in the streets Norman swung along, regardless of the sunshine, and the twittering birds, and the general radiance of the spring morning. Once more the old problem hammered at his brain; "How—how—how could he protect her, if she refused to have anything to do with him?"

Should he go to Donegal and see what sort of a man was this Pat, to whom she had undoubtedly given her heart, whether the Lionel engagement meant anything or not? Or should he go back to Canada and see her again, and try once more to win her? Yet if he won her by frightening her with the account of how the story had leaked out, what was that to him? To take a half-hearted, driven consent would never satisfy him now. He must have all, or nothing. Better nothing than a wrung consent! Rather would he see Pat, and find out if happiness and safety lay there for her; and afterwards strive to be contented to guard her from

afar. He did not now believe he had much reason to suppose she would marry Lionel. Perhaps she had made up the whole thing to get rid of himself. She was clever enough to do that ; but she was not foolish enough seriously to contemplate marrying a youth like Lionel. Well, in any case, he would have gained nothing by staying in Kneller then ; and probably he would gain nothing if he went back so soon. Clearly he must possess his soul in patience a little longer, watching for the opportunity, for the psychological moment, when he might yet outstrip both Pat and Lionel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BACKWOODS AGAIN.

THE winter days dragged by very wearily for Kitt, after Lionel's tragic death. In the first shock of it, and after her cry followed by the fainting fit, she told Edith Hope the story of the hotel incident. Edith reassured her, and braced up her nerves as well as she could, seeming to make light of the incident; but Kitt perceived that she did this in great part for her sake; and she began more thoroughly to realise what a difficult problem it was in some circumstances.

However, Edith urged her to put it out of her memory, and think no more about it, seeing that if anything preyed upon her mind while the shock of Lionel's death lasted, she might have a serious nervous breakdown. But the fine scorn with which Kitt had first met the difficulties, now deserted her somewhat, and, unknown to her aunt, she fretted and worried in secret. And all the time it grew upon her more and more, that if she could once get back to Donegal and Pat, something of an evil spell that seemed to hang over her would be broken. She felt herself out of her element altogether, at large in a world where a perfectly simple mistake could so easily destroy one's peace; and she longed, with ever-growing longing, to steal back into the careless, joyous life she had left behind, never to leave it again. In the silent night hours she upbraided herself on Lionel's account, thinking of the things she now felt she ought not to have said and done; and she steeled her heart more resolutely against Norman, as the cause of the trouble in the beginning.

When she received a letter from him, she shut her

heart to its simple, manly sincerity, and merely replied in a few perfunctory lines, because he had told her that if he heard nothing at all, he should come in person to see that she was all right. But she did not tell him of Lionel's death, and he only learned of it by accident some time afterwards.

In the meantime, life went on in much the same routine at Kneller. The snow wrapped them in its long silence all through the winter, and except for a small, enclosed rink, where they could skate, and a little amusement with toboggans, they had no variety.

In February Mr. Hope took them all to Port Arthur, on the Lake, in his private saloon-car, to stay for a little while at the hotel. Kitt would have enjoyed the trip more if they had not been obliged to have so much unadulterated Chip and Gladys. The latter was taken in the hope that the two little girls would amuse each other, and leave their elders in peace. But as they quickly grew bored with the train, bored with each other, and generally quarrelsome in consequence, both Kitt and Edith wished devoutly they had left them behind. Chip slept in a little bunk above Kitt; and the first morning, she began the day at some unearthly hour by eating an orange, of which the juice contrived to drip down upon Kitt in the bunk below.

Over her complaints Chip only smiled a fatuous smile, and told her not to put so much "side" on. Kitt reached up to box her ears, and Chip dodged and clambered out of her bunk. She peeped into the little kitchen, and descried the Chinese attendant's pigtail hanging like a long bell-rope from his bunk. Chip's curiosity instantly became her dominating instinct. Did it come off, or did it not? She meditated a little, and decided that the cook had no business to be in bed so late; and the next moment she was tugging at the pigtail with all her might and main, while she said peremptorily:

"Get up! Get up! What do you mean by being still in bed, you lazy lout?"

Not unnaturally, the Chinaman was deeply injured, and it took her mother some time to pacify him. But

when she attempted to scold and reason with Miss Forsyth-Hope, she was met by the reply :

"For goodness' sake, don't make such a fuss! I only wanted to see if it came off."

A threat to tell her father had a more marked effect ; but when Chip began the day in that manner it usually meant little peace for any one before nightfall. The only thing that finally subdued her was when at dinner she fidgeted until her chair went over backwards. The injured Chinaman was just about to hand a dish of custard to her, and he was so overcome that he upset a lot of it, which fell on her face and hair and on the floor. No one sympathised with her at all, and Gladys laughed herself ill. In a furious temper Miss Forsyth-Hope took herself off to bed, after her mother had sponged off the mess as well as she could, and offended her beyond redemption by laughing all the while.

"If that beastly Chinaman laughs, I shall cut his pigtail in two to-morrow morning," she snapped viciously. Then she hurled the soap-dish at the still hysterical Gladys, and refused to speak to any one else that night. But when they reached Port Arthur, and she was allowed to array herself in her party frock for dinner at the hotel, all feud was forgotten, and they abstracted a great deal of amusement from the hauteur with which she treated the waiter, and the old-fashioned cynicism with which she discussed the menu.

The people in Port Arthur formed a very charming little circle—musical, well-read, gay, interesting—and they opened their arms to the fugitives from Backwoods stagnation as only Canadians know how to.

And, finally, there was the wonder and beauty of the return journey. They had arrived at Port Arthur at night, thus passing the loveliest part of their route in the dark ; but they left it again in the early morning.

Kitt was enchanted with the wonder of that frosty morning, and carried the picture of it long in her mind. Out in the beautiful ice-bound bay, the islands known as "The Sleeping Giant" and "The Sisters" seemed to have a loveliness all their own, lying there on their bed of ice. The Bay of Port Arthur has often been

likened to the Bay of Naples, and there is a similarity in the summer, but in the winter the Canadian Bay is unique. It is a sea of ice, studded with snow-topped islands, which, seen at sunrise, reflect most wonderfully the red and golden glow, standing out in exquisite clearness of outline and intensity of colour in the keen air. A little later in the day it presents, instead of the usual cloud of steamboats and sailing vessels, the unusual spectacle of a sea made gay by skaters while sleighs with silver bells drive about on it, and heavy wagons use it as a highway.

For some distance after leaving Port Arthur the scenery is superb. The line takes a succession of curves along the extreme edge of the lake, and the whole scene is thrilling and mystic. On one side is a sheer rock precipice, in the winter-time hung with huge masses of transparent green ice, decorated with fringes of sparkling icicles. On the other side, the "Great Lake," silent and sad beneath the strenuous frost; grandly lonely amidst snow-crowned mountains and vast, pathless forests. And on a ledge between giant precipices and vast lake, like a little shelf on the mountain side, a toy train winds in and out, and round, and through, with much puffing of steam and clanging of big brass bell. Just beneath the ledge, where the water and the land meet, are beautiful little arches of frozen spray, and trees and bushes decked with a lovely foliage of scintillating hoar frost, and clusters of icicles, sparkling and glancing in the sunshine.

Sometimes, as Kitt's train swung on, only a foot or two seemed to divide it from immediate and absolute destruction. A faulty rail, a bad skid on the slippery, frosty iron, and the whole train with its freight of human souls, would have vanished for ever through the ice into the deep water below. But who would think of that in the heart of such a scene? the sublime calm of the frozen sea, the solemn immutability of the sentinel hills keeping watch and ward over its long sleep, the awe-inspiring unapproachableness of nature in those untrodden solitudes, accentuated by her winter garment of ice and snow?

Kitt took a book and sat facing the wonderful scene, wishing that she could have been alone with it, undisturbed. She thought when she got back to Donegal she would rejoice over having seen it. It would be a picture she would like to conjure up, dreaming by the peat fire in the shabby sitting-room of her beloved home. She knew there would be many other pictures also, to fill some of the idle hours of dreaming, pictures of strenuous life at the front, where men and women toiled together to carry the boundaries of civilisation ever farther into the wilderness; pictures of unrecognised heroism, where women like Edith Hope "won through" the awful monotony and stagnation of backwoods life without much noise or plaint; pictures of dainty hands bravely and cheerfully doing menial work, and tired faces smiling above tired hearts, the grit of the race showing still the spirit that was in the Pilgrim Fathers when they went to their untried exile, still there to-day in every man and woman doing his or her best under trying conditions. Sometimes a thought blew like a little cloud through Kitt's brain. Would it all be as satisfying again in Donegal as it had been? Would the idle, dreaming purposeless life still content her?

But she did not seek to keep the thought; rather, she thrust it away. Was not Pat there beside the splendid headlands, the sweeping waves, the lovely moorlands? Could there be anything but content for her with him?

They reached Kneller again in the evening, tired out with the shaking, swinging train, and found themselves only too quickly claimed once more by the old strenuous conditions. A kindly neighbour had gone in and lighted fires for them, but there was nothing prepared to eat or drink, and most of the food in the larder was frozen solid. The butter and the milk was frozen, and there was no meat, as they had ordered. Mr. Hope hurried out to the butcher, and came back with the news that his beast had frozen that day before he could cut it up, and now he was helpless.

So they hauled up one of the large fish stored in the

cellar, and after hard work managed to saw off a piece of the frozen flesh.

Then the daily routine began again, and lasted until the snow melted into slush indescribable, and the end of the winter appeared in sight.

But Kitt was not to stay to see the summer. She seemed to be seriously ailing as soon as the damp, slushy period settled in, and Edith Hope decided to send her back home to her own soft breezes. Perhaps the shock of Lionel's death had preyed on her mind more than they suspected; or perhaps the memory of the incident that seemed to Kitt to be chiefly responsible for it fretted and undermined her health.

If she could have left her husband and Chip, Edith would have loved to go with her, but the obstacles were too insurmountable, and Kitt would have to go alone.

So the last day came, and presently the clanging bell would announce the arrival of the Eastward-bound express Kitt had watched so often, and at the familiar little station she would take leave of all her Canadian friends.

As she was fixing on her hat, Edith Hope came into her room. She fidgeted about with a touch of uneasiness, and then said diffidently: "I suppose you will see Mr. Lutterworth some time, Kitt dear?"

"Oh, I think not. Why should I?"

Edith smiled a little. "He hardly looked the man to drop a cause easily."

"But he knows I do not want to see him. I have told him so."

"Have you? I am rather sorry. Things may not be the same as when you left, and I think he would be a good friend to a woman. If—if—any difficulty arose through what happened at Montreal, Kitt, it would be as well to let him know. You will be very much alone without your father; and I am so far away over here. I think I should be easier in my mind if you would promise to do that much."

"But no difficulty is likely to arise in Ireland. It is different there. But I will tell you."

"Very well. Let me know at once, and if necessary

I will come over. But don't go out of your way to repulse Mr. Lutterworth, just because you fancy you dislike him. Try at least to be neutral. He might be able to be of great help to you in a dilemma."

Kitt promised, in order to ease her aunt's mind, but the old, confident spirit was returning already, and she knew in her heart that no occasion could ever arise when she would need Norman Lutterworth's protection. Was she not going back to Pat, surely—surely—to be separated from him no more?

So the last moment came, and with a great clanging the train steamed out of Kneller, leaving Edith Hope on the platform looking a little wistfully after its vanishing rear, seeing pictures of dear, comfortable, homey England, and keenly conscious for a brief while of her exile.

But the last picture in Kitt's mind was Miss Forsyth-Hope, with her little snub nose very high in the air, informing a lanky boy, with whose young affections she had been seriously trifling, that when her cousin reached England she would probably be met by her uncle, the King. So Kitt sank back into her seat, laughing inwardly

CHAPTER XXIV.

PAT.

BUT before Kitt reached England coincidence and circumstance had again been busy with her life-story, in a way so strange that mere fiction again almost shrinks from it. The death of an uncle made it necessary for Patrick Mahon to cross to London on business, and also put him in possession of two hundred and fifty pounds a year; which fortune, added to his one hundred pounds, and his bit of land, made him feel quite a rich man in Donegal. Most certainly he would be able to buy a new boat. That was among his first thoughts when he realised the glad tidings, standing with the letter in his hand looking out over Fintra Bay. His second thoughts comprised a small car to run quickly over to Killybegs, where the boat had to be kept, and which he had always had to reach on foot or by bicycle.

It was only his third thought that included Kitt. And that was somewhat typical of Pat.

Patrick Mahon had been an idler all his life. He might be said to be soaked through and through with the enervating influence of the Irish climate. He had no enterprise, and no initiative, although he was the most outrageous poacher in the country. Pat had no shooting or fishing of his own, but he enjoyed the finest sport procurable on his neighbours' domains. But it should be explained at once that no one grudged it to him seriously, for he was a great favourite with all who knew him. Pat was the type of Irishman who has a kindly word for every one, and a treasure-trove of sly quips; and if his finances dwindled to a shilling, he was still perfectly ready to share it. He could fight, too, like

all good Irishmen, and no one could cast a fly better. And he was good-looking in a careless fashion ; but his clothes always wanted brushing ; and his hair, and his finger nails, and his shirts might have made the fastidious groan. To put it concisely, Pat was a good-looking, charming Irishman ; but there was something wanting, and that something weakened all the rest. He had no reliability. If Pat told you in the morning that he would " be there in an hour," he might come during the afternoon or he might come the next day. In either case he would not think it necessary to offer explanation or apology ; though this might be because he had forgotten that he had specified any time. He would invite you to come and see him, forget you were coming, and have nothing worth speaking of to eat or drink. Or you might drop in unexpectedly, and find him swearing because his larder was so full that its contents were going bad. A violent fit of industry would make him hustle every one and get some land tilled for planting ; then reaction would set in, a new fancy take him, and he would forget to sow the seed. But of course it did not matter in the least so long as he remained in Donegal and had only himself to consider, and the splendid income of three hundred and fifty pounds a year. Why, he could buy a big sailing yacht on that ! Life was suddenly gorgeous—immense !

There was one other trait that should be mentioned because of the light it throws upon what follows. By nature Pat was a bigot. About certain things it was natural to him to draw hard and fast lines. To move outside those lines warped his personality. He seldom saw two sides of a question. Black and white he thoroughly understood. Grey was difficult. The only thing was, he never had occasion to come up against this trait in himself, idling away the hours on that little bit of land of his. For this was before the question of Home Rule had embittered more or less every man in Ireland.

As for Kitt, Pat thought there was no one else in the world like her ; but then it must be remembered that his world did not comprise much beyond a few

acres, a bay to sail in, moors to shoot over, and a very restricted population in the little seaport two miles away. That Kitt could have held her own for grace and beauty, not only in a big seaport, but in an ultra-fashionable seaside resort, was a fact he was not in the least aware of. Her tearlessness delighted him, so also did her quick repartee; but he was not so partial to her wilfulness, as he had an old-fashioned idea that women ought always to give way to men, and that there was something unwomanly in independent thought. By which Pat surely showed himself the veriest babe in matters feminine.

Anything in the smallest degree unwomanly, according to his own particular standard, he abhorred. And then, again, though he thought there was no one in the world like Kitt, it was significant that she only came third on the list of his rejoicing when the legacy fell to him. It would appear that the new yacht was in truth his heart's desire; though, of course, he would have argued that "it was for Kitt's pleasure as well as his own." Whether he was in love with Kitt or not he had never asked himself. It seemed so unnecessary. He had grown up with a sort of understanding that some day he would marry her, so why exhaust brain energy in considering the ins and outs of it? He *wanted* to marry her, and he thought she wanted to marry him; though he had never actually asked her, because—well, it seemed so unnecessary. Of course, he would ask her some day. When she came back from Canada would be a good time. He had not written to her more than a half-sheet or two while she was away, because he hated writing letters, and, besides, he had not had the time—such a busy man was Pat with his old boat and his old gun and his bit of land.

But he had quite nice thoughts about her, particularly that day when he stood looking across Fintra Bay, with the letter of glad tidings in his hand, after he had exhausted the idea of the new yacht and the little car. It was a beautiful prospect, that view over Donegal Bay, with the blue mountains of Galway looking so ethereal and romantic on the opposite shore. And

an early spring had painted the emerald into Ireland a little earlier that year, and spread lovely patches of colour over the moorlands and mountains behind him. A fit setting indeed for Kitt's lovely Irish face, with the Celtic soul of her in the deep eyes, tinged with melancholy and shadowy setting. If only there had been a little more of the true Celt in Pat, a little more of the intense, passionate, emotional nature of that ancient race, whose poets have sung such beautiful songs of the loves of their people. Well, there it was, and none may gainsay it: Pat received news of his legacy, and thought first of his prospective yacht, while his prospective bride only came third, though she was on the eve of returning to him, upheld through all difficulties and problems and cares by the thought of the wonderful deep joy they were soon to have together.

Two days later Pat went to London.

Getting himself there was a great deal of trouble. Heavens! how he hated it. His one good suit was moth-eaten. His bowler hat was a caricature. He had no tie fit to be seen, and all his shirts were frayed at the cuffs. The difficulty of getting anything approaching a decent rig-out nearly made him shirk going. It is doubtful if anything but the hope of that yacht would have lured him to the station at the little port two miles away and into the Dublin train. Then, the exertion of getting himself from the train to the steamer, and from the steamer to the train again, made him wish that he had not come. But that was nothing to London! The establishing of himself in an hotel made him wish himself dead, for he found that the one where he had planned to stay was full. In the end, he found himself settled for a week in a well-known hotel in South Kensington. And there it was that Norman's aunt, Mrs. Strange, crossed his path.

CHAPTER XXV.

DEAR DONEGAL.

MRS. STRANGE and Hester had moved into the South Kensington hotel for a few weeks while their house was in the hands of the painters and paperers. To Hester it was a great relief. A *tête-à-tête* life with her mother was sometimes almost unendurable.

With Norman's generous support she was now engaged to her young naval lieutenant, and would have been radiantly happy had not her mother lost no opportunity of being unpleasant over it. Not that she had anything personally against Gilbert Ashton, except that he was not rich. In every other respect he could fulfil almost any requirements. Honest, upright, athletic, good-looking, of good family, he would be a son-in-law to be proud of; but he only possessed three hundred pounds a year of his own, besides his pay, and Norman's income was over ten thousand pounds.

Moreover, Mrs. Strange had had nothing to do with the match, had never even countenanced the attachment; therefore she chose to vent a great deal of her angry disappointment upon poor Hester. Hester did not greatly mind while she had such happy hopes and dreams about Gilbert; but she certainly preferred life in the hotel, where there were no silent meals shut up with her mother in a room alone, as on the occasions when her mother chose to be mute.

They had a private sitting-room, but they did not often use it, preferring the light and gaiety of the hotel lounge. And it was here that Hester became acquainted with Patrick Mahon. She had noticed him on his

first evening, looking out of place and utterly forlorn, and had wished to speak to him, but no opportunity presented itself without making her action rather conspicuous, so she made no attempt. On the second evening, however, he chanced to sit quite close to them, and when Hester's ball of silk, connected at one end with a tie she was knitting, rolled accidentally to his feet, he picked it up and handed it back to her.

Hester had a charming smile, and the depressed and forlorn Pat looked at her so pathetically that she could not choose but speak to him. After half an hour's chat he revived considerably, and amused her with his Irishisms, and they became quite good friends.

Later on, Hester spoke of him to her mother by way of making conversation at breakfast.

"He's rather a dear," she said, "and he does so hate London. He says the tube trains don't stop long enough for him to get in, and the buses don't take any notice when he stands on the kerb and waves to them. He says he has never really been in a hurry in his life, and the way all London is hurrying from morning till night makes him feel giddy."

"Where does he come from?"

"Some queer little place in Donegal, near Killybegs."

"Near Killybegs?" Mrs. Strange pricked up her ears.

"Yes. He appears to have some land there, and he's just aching all the time to get back to it."

Mrs. Strange said no more, but while Hester was away at a dance that evening, she made a special point of entering into conversation with the forlorn Pat.

For since the scene with Norman a month ago Dora Strange had not been idle. In order to pursue her revenge she had ferreted out information concerning the girl that Norman so obviously and candidly loved. She knew that Miss Fitzgerald had gone to Canada for six or eight months only, and would then be returning to her home in Donegal; that her home was just outside a little seaport named Killybegs; and that her father was a naval captain who had died just before she went

to Canada. She knew also that Kitt was in the early twenties, and very pretty. That she would so soon be coming back vexed her exceedingly. Was Norman to have an easy triumph after all? Was this Kathleen to come back happily to her home, and Norman to go across the water and win her, without any unpleasantness whatever? "Not if I can help it," said Dora Strange, and meditated going casually over to Donegal herself, to sow the seeds of suspicion. Thus it was little wonder that she listened keenly when Hester, in all simplicity, mentioned Killybegs. It was as if an instrument for her cruel purpose had leaped straight into her hand. If she started the ball of scandal rolling in that little seaport town, it would perhaps make Norman realise more fully the difficulty of taking Kitt to Lutterworth Manor as his wife. For evidently there was something he could not deny, for all his bitter indignation; and however small a matter it was it might prove the little rift in the lute that would spoil all the music. It certainly never entered her head for a moment that the course of action she proposed might conceivably roll away an obstacle, instead of building one.

Pat found Mrs. Strange very pleasant and friendly; for no one could be more agreeable than she when it suited her purpose. She sat and chatted to him while she embroidered a teacloth, encouraging him to talk about himself, instead of bewildering him with references to up-to-date affairs of which he knew nothing. Finally, she asked him to go to a theatre with them the next evening, and left him with a feeling of established friendship. The evening at the theatre was a success; and the following evening she asked him to escort her to a concert, as her daughter did not want to go. Pat went willingly, for London, generally speaking, made him feel utterly lost; but when this handsome, fashionable woman chatted to him in such a friendly way the lost feeling vanished.

It was while driving to the concert that she asked him suddenly if he knew a girl who lived near Killybegs, named Kathleen Fitzgerald.

Pat started a little, and said "Yes."

"Oh, how interesting!" she cried. "I want so much to know something about her. She is out in Canada just now, I believe?"

"Yes," said Pat again.

"And coming home shortly?"

Again Pat replied with the monosyllable. He was not a talker at any time, and seldom used two words if one would do.

"I should like very much to have a little chat with you about her," his companion continued. "Is she—is she—quite a *nice* girl?" with a slight inflexion in her tone.

"Yes, certainly," said Pat in surprise. "Why?"

"Well," with a slightly troubled air, perfectly acted, "I've heard something rather strange about her, and it worries me a good deal, because there appears to be some attachment between her and my nephew, Norman Lutterworth."

"Oh!" Pat made no attempt to conceal his curiosity.

"Yes. They met in Canada, you know. Of course, Norman is the head of his family, and owns the family place. It matters a good deal that he marries a suitable wife."

Pat was even more taken aback and astonished than he showed. His habit of little speech kept him staring silently out of the window of the taxi, and so hiding his feelings.

"Of course, I don't know that there is any actual question of marriage between them, and I very much hope there is not, as it is a very peculiar story I have heard about her. I suppose she is a lady?" doubtfully.

"Certainly." Pat spoke with a shade of asperity.

"Oh, well, that's all right! But, still, I don't like this story. I have urged my nephew to break the friendship, and I hope he will."

"What is the story?"

"I must tell you afterwards. We are just there. By the way, is she a friend of yours, because if so, perhaps I had better not say any more?"

"Yes, she is a friend of mine. I have known her a long time."

"Ah, then shall we not say any more?"

"Surely, now, it would be better to tell me. I may be able to explain a misunderstanding."

"I'm afraid not"—anxiously—"but I'll tell you afterwards."

All through the programme Pat fidgeted nervously. What could have happened for this woman to have heard something that evidently cast a reflection on Kitt? Of course, it could not be true, but how strange that there should be anything. Kitt must have done something indiscreet in one of those wilful moods of hers.

At the interval, Mrs. Strange went a little further. "They went out on the same ship, you know"—leaving it to be understood that she still pursued the same subject—"and evidently they got very friendly. A connection of my husband's was staying at the Westminster Hotel in Montreal, and according to her they passed as husband and wife there. It is an extraordinary story. I cannot understand it at all. Because Norman is not that sort of man." She stole a glance at Pat, and saw that he had gone rather white, and was staring hard in front of him.

"There must be some misunderstanding," he said in a slightly hollow voice.

"Well, that is exactly what I said; but this relative, Mrs. Lee, was so positive, that I asked Norman outright." She paused, but he only waited. She lowered her voice to make it more impressive, and added; "To my utter astonishment, Norman did not deny it."

"Then, they are married?" he exclaimed, half under his breath.

"No. He emphatically declares that they are not. He says she *refuses* to marry him."

"I think it must be all due to a misunderstanding," said Pat, looking suddenly relieved.

"That is what I want to think—for Norman's sake; but the odd part is, that he admits they were at the hotel together—under—under those circumstances."

"Impossible!" burst from Pat.

The interval came to an end then and the programme continued, leaving Pat to digest in silence the infamous story so cleverly suggested.

When the concert was over and they were driving home, he immediately said: "I am certain there is some mistake. It must be some one else, not Kitt Fitzgerald."

"I'm sure I hope it may be. Come into my sitting-room at the hotel, and I'll tell you what appears to have happened."

In her room, she sent for whisky and soda for him. Then she sat down beside him in a confidential, friendly manner, and told him the history of the overturned lamp, and how, owing to the accident, the story came out.

Again and again Pat protested that it was a lie; but her logic was merciless, and she twisted him as she wished.

"You say she will be home soon, and you know her quite well," she concluded. "Then I ask you, Mr. Mahon, for *my* sake, find some real disproof of this story. It is a dreadful thing for us, to feel that Norman has this attachment; but if the story is all a misunderstanding, and Miss Fitzgerald is as nice as you say, we need not trouble any more. You would really be doing a great kindness if you could prove it was all a lie. Suppose you ask her straight out about the fire, and what caused it."

"I know it is a lie," he insisted doggedly. "I have known Kitt since she was a child. She may have been indiscreet, but nothing worse."

"I can't tell you how glad I am to hear you say so. Will you be a dear, good fellow and drop me a line after you have seen her? One naturally so hates a story of this kind, and I should be thankful to be able to refute it. Perhaps you'd better not mention my name, as I do not want her to be prejudiced against me. All you need do is simply to ask her if there was a fire, and what caused it. You might add that owing to some evident mistake a lady at the hotel says Mr. Lutterworth was

in her room at the time, and ask her what has given rise to it."

All that she said made Pat feel hot, and miserable, and angry in a futile, impotent sort of way; for though she kept on stating that, of course, she believed it all a mistake, she yet very adroitly gave the impression that she knew it was not; and at the same time gave him no opportunity to hit out on Kitt's behalf. He had only one more day in London, and that in very truth was wretched enough, and all the more so because Mrs. Strange left no stone unturned to finish the work she had begun: namely, to undermine his faith in Kathleen Fitzgerald, hoping he would show it, in some way, in the neighbourhood of her home. And because Pat was of an impressionable nature, adopting the opinions of others rather than threshing things out for himself, she succeeded in so far that she sent him home restless and unhappy, and eager for Kitt's denial. Although he felt it treacherous to his old playfellow, he could not for the life of him help wondering if in any way her trip abroad had changed her.

That such a story was possible at all was so astonishing to him, that it seemed it would be scarcely less astonishing if there were something in it! And that thought gave him a choking sensation, and an underlying sense of horror. It is often said of Irishwomen that they are the most virtuous in the world, which implies a high standard both for men and women. The women live up to it, and the men undoubtedly expect it of them. A breath of slander would therefore seem in such a country more dreadful than in one where things were more lax.

Mrs. Strange had distinctly stated that Kitt refused to marry this man Lutterworth, whoever he was. Therefore, she was probably standing by the unspoken agreement with him, Pat. But supposing the mystery remained, and she could not clear it up? To Pat, with his simple creed of black and white, it was a dreadful thought. He felt bewildered by the amazing turn of events, and returned to Ireland thoroughly worried, in spite of having successfully accomplished his business

in London. The first thing he saw was a letter directed in Kitt's handwriting.

He opened and read it with a pucker in his forehead, rarely indeed seen there.

She told him in a few joyous lines that she should arrive by the following mail, and come with all possible haste to Killybegs. "But do meet me at Liverpool," she wrote. "I should so love to see you standing on the quay to welcome me. Even now I can hardly believe I am indeed coming back. I am writing to tell Biddy to fill the house with flowers for me, and to be standing at the door with open arms."

There was a true ring about the letter that pleased him. Of course, she would easily explain. Dear old Kitt! How splendid it would be to have her back again! But all the week the worry of this strange story followed him. As far as he could, he looked at the case from every aspect, only to feel still more bewildered in the end.

And sometimes he asked himself: "Supposing it *were* true?"

For argument's sake he let himself suppose it, and in doing so he learnt that his affection for Kitt was not strong enough to withstand such a story. He cared for her more than for any one else; but, then, he did not care for any one else at all, and therefore the measure did not necessarily mean very much. Still, he was genuinely fond of her in his lazy way, and if events had run smoothly he would have been glad to marry her, and have been proud of her afterwards; and probably Kitt would have been satisfied after a fashion, because he would be just what he had always been, with the addition of the new relationship. And, doubtless, they would have gone on their smiling, careless, idle way, well enough content.

But if this story were not a mere slander, if it was one of those lies that held a damnable half-truth, there was that in his blood, in his very race, that would give him no peace any more. Rather than face such a union they must break with each other altogether.

Idle and careless in all things, at least he knew himself

well enough to realise that separation was the only course open to them.

Thus it was no wonder he waited for the day that should bring her with an anxiety in his heart that he could not dissipate.

When Kitt strained her eyes towards the group of people waiting for the steamer at Liverpool, and when she saw no familiar figure, her heart felt a little grieved. She felt so sure that he would come, and had foolishly rehearsed, over and over, the joy of their meeting.

For her, that meeting would mean the end of her pursuing trouble, as well as the dawning of a glad new life. The Montreal incident would surely be left behind in Canada for good; and there would be no need ever to leave her beloved Donegal again. She smiled as she thought how Pat would treat the story, for she meant to tell him at the first opportunity. How he would scorn it! and be angry that any one could ever have thought twice about it seriously! She was not yet sure if she should tell him at once about Norman's offer to marry her. It really seemed so absurd, it was hardly worth repeating. Perhaps she would tell him at some later date, when they were able to laugh at the whole episode.

Then she put it out of her mind, to think only of the joy of being so nearly at home again. And all across Ireland she sat with her eyes glued to the window, as one who literally drank in the loved scenery and could never assuage her thirst.

The train reached Killybegs about six p.m., but as it was already the month of May, there would be a long, light evening before them. She thought she would like him to go with her to her father's grave. It would please that dear spirit to know that she thought so much of him on the first evening of her return. Then the whistle shrieked to give warning that they were just arriving, and she stood up and craned her head out of the window.

Yes—he was there! She saw his tall figure on the platform; and—yes, it was the same old hat and the same old shooting suit that he had worn for years! How dear of him to come looking exactly as usual!

It seemed as if she could only have been as far as the little town of Donegal to do some shopping.

She waved her hand and thrust open the door almost before the train stopped; then she sprang out, and went towards him with shining eyes and both hands extended.

Pat came forward quickly, and took her hands in his, but he did not seem to be going to kiss her. With a tiny cold chill Kitt daringly raised her lovely face.

"Aren't you going to kiss me, Pat, after all these ages?"

He leant down and touched her face with his lips, saying something, a little bashfully, about her being a travelled young lady now.

"But I'm not any different!" she cried. "I'm really exactly the same. Oh, Pat! it is so splendid to see you again, so splendid to come back home."

He looked into her eyes, and his spirits rose instantly. Yes, she was exactly the same. How ridiculous he had been to let himself get anxious or worried at all! How good it was to see her again. He had scarcely realised before how much he had missed her. And now it would all be put right, and he need never be worried with the silly story any more. It only remained to tell her about it, and ask for that disproof which he had promised to send to Mrs. Strange.

"We'll have tea at the hotel before we go out," he said. "Biddy is in a wild state of excitement. She will never give you time for bite or sup this evening. She has decorated the house like a harvest festival."

"Dear old Biddy!" murmured Kitt, and then her eyes grew moist, thinking of the welcome that could never be hers again.

But at tea that tiny, unaccountable chill seemed to come back. In some odd way Pat was preoccupied, and once or twice he seemed to be looking at her strangely. She asked him why he had not come to Liverpool, and he gave no special reason at all, and looked a trifle confused. The fact was, he felt eager to have this tiresome matter cleared up and the cloud swept away.

It worried him while it hung in the balance. But he

was determined he would not introduce the subject that first evening. To-morrow would do quite as well. It would be too mean to bother her with a matter of that sort her first night. So he went home with her, and saw Biddy, the old housekeeper, who had had the care of her from a baby, break down and sob for joy, just to see her again. And he saw her run from room to room in the old ramshackle house, glorying in it as if it were a palace ; while Biddy toiled after her, murmuring, " Eh, the bonny, bonny colleen ! Isn't she that bonny now, Maister Patrick ? "

Then he went with her to her father's grave, and when a hand stole into his he held it tightly. But he said no word of the future, and in that Kitt was disappointed. She had thought that they would even fix their wedding-day that very evening. And he had not even mentioned it !

" Ah ! he is just waiting for to-morrow," she told herself.

And Pat thought of the morrow also.

" I'll get this wretched business over and done with, once for all," ran his thought ; " then we can start clear."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE REVELATION.

IT was curious how restless and unsettled Norman felt the evening that Kitt returned to her old home. He had spent the usual half-hour in the drawing-room with his mother, and then retired to his den to smoke and write letters. But the letters would not take form, and he walked up and down the room. He had been away from home paying visits, to attend a few race-meetings, passing from one gay house-party to another ; but his restlessness had gone with him, and he had not enjoyed himself.

He had no news of Kitt, and it worried him exceedingly that he had no idea whether she was coming home shortly or not. She had not written since January and then, only the cold little letter stating that there was no occasion for him to be anxious. In the meantime he had learnt about Lionel's tragic death. One house he stayed at numbered a Canadian among its guests, and Norman saw an allusion to it in a Montreal newspaper the visitor left in the smoke-room. He made inquiries, and the Canadian remembered enough of the case to tell him that Lionel apparently went for a walk along the line after dark, and was frozen to death. That was as far back as January, and Kitt had never told him. He thought he understood her reticence, and smiled a little over it. She was determined not to let him know that she was free—of what he now felt had been only a subterfuge. But, at the same time, it must have cast a gloom over the little backwoods settlement, and have upset Kitt a good deal, if only as a friend. And

then, there might easily be more in it than met the eye. Why should Lionel go for a walk in the dark on an evening when the thermometer registered forty-eight degrees below zero? There might have been some trouble which Kitt had kept to herself; and if so, he knew quite well she would fret secretly and blame herself bitterly. He thought over it again as he paced his room that evening. And all the time the feeling gained ground that Kitt was in trouble, or, that some trouble was threatening her. If so, he could not possibly sit still and not attempt to do anything. He thought he would cable to her in the morning, but even if she replied how would he know how much she had chosen to leave untold? Probably she would cable back "All right," and say no more. And she might be actually in need of him all the time, and too proud to say so.

Up and down the room he paced, his thin, clever face growing more and more anxious over that thought of threatened trouble. Odd that he should feel such a consciousness of it all those hundreds of miles away. At any other period of his life he would have scoffed at the idea. Love had taught him so many things that he no longer scoffed at all where love was concerned. It held such unknown potentialities, who might draw any dividing line in its power. In the love that lies down with a man and rises up with him; goes out and comes in with him; sits at meat with him; journeys with him wherever he goes; and is like a film through which he looks upon all the familiar details of daily life, there might well be some mental chord, some occult power, which would respond to any trouble threatening the beloved.

Then, finally, he took himself to task for staying on quietly there at Lutterworth Manor when difficulties might be gathering of which he knew nothing, and which possibly he alone could grapple with. Was it quite the best way of following his quest? Patience and resolve might work a great deal; but, of course, there could arise a need for action as well. And suddenly he knew how he should welcome such a call. He had been patient because he was persuaded it was the only course at the

time. But if action were needed, how thankful, how thrice thankful, he would be !

The house-parties bored him, for no one seemed to him fair in comparison with Kitt, and no one interested him. Advances, shy and otherwise, to the man with a name, an estate, and ten thousand pounds a year, vexed and irritated him. Of old, his sense of humour had been something of a safeguard. Just now even his humour seemed to have deserted him. He wondered if "Miss Forsyth-Hope," even, would have been other than aggravating. He took himself to task for his dullness and got no satisfaction from it. He *was* dull, he *was* bored, and, awful calamity ! he had lost his sense of humour. Certainly, something must be done at once, before his loss became too patent to all the world.

He sat down in his big chair, and, as often, conjured up Kitt's dark head against the red morocco in the one next him. But she was no longer blinking lazily at the fire like a contented kitten, and her picture in that guise refused to come to him. Instead, she seemed to be sitting upright, staring in front of her, with eyes of wide, incredulous dismay. His vivid imagination carried him further, and he saw a hunted expression come over her face, as of some following decree that she could not break away from—something that dogged her steps like a threatening shadow, and appeared suddenly at the most unexpected moments. So vivid did it become at last, that he half exclaimed, "Oh ! why don't you send for me if anything is the matter ?" Then he shook himself irritably and laughed. Of course, she would not send. She would die before she would bring herself to ask anything of him after that interview in his sitting-room at Montreal. But that need not prevent his going to her. She might not choose to ask him, but he could go all the same. Yes, that was what he must do, if he would find any peace of mind again. He must go out to Canada, and see if any trouble had arisen. He had told her he should come if she did not write. Well, she had not written. Therefore, he would go. Relief came into his face at once when he had

made up his mind. The thought of action dominated him, the merciful release from inaction. Without any more delay he rose and studied his Bradshaw, jotted down his trains, and decided to start by the next boat from Liverpool, little dreaming, indeed, that Kitt was even then in her own little bed in Donegal.

But as Kitt lay down that night she, too, had her vague sense of impending trouble—nothing tangible, that she could take hold of and face, yet something that left her with a disappointed feeling. She had not thought the meeting with Pat would have been as it was. She had felt certain he would come to Liverpool in the first place, or that if he did not, he would have a good reason. As a matter of fact, he had done neither the one nor the other. And then he had said nothing at all about the future. In her dreams, in the happy pictures of her imagination, she had seen herself in Pat's arms that very evening, held safe from all following shadows. And he had not opened his arms to her—only held her hand at the side of her father's grave, and only kissed her when she asked for it.

"But to-morrow it will be all right," was her thought as she fell asleep.

When Pat came on the morrow she was out in the untidy, riotous garden, without a hat, singing to herself as she surveyed with loving eyes the general disorder, and occasionally standing to gaze with deep gladness at the dream mountains on the Galway shore across the lovely bay. In the sunlight her hair looked blue-black as a jay's wing, and her skin was fairer than the foam breaking all along the sand of Fintra Bay, and her eyes more mystically, ethereally blue even than the sea and the mountains; for they had that shadowy violet tinge, as of the violet depths beneath the sun-kissed waves. Pat saw it all in his lazy fashion, and his heart approved. He wished very much that this tiresome story had never taken shape and found its way to his ears. When he came to her she held up her face to him again with a smiling simplicity, for had he not been as a brother before ever he was only a friend? Pat kissed her rather as a matter of course, and then they

spoke for a little of the garden. Finally, they drifted to a shady seat.

"Come and sit down," he said. "I want to talk to you."

And Kitt smiled softly. She knew what it was he had to talk about.

And then, all in a moment, the whole world changed.

Kitt was never quite clear afterwards how he began, or, indeed, about anything; but she remembered that it was as if the sun suddenly went out of her paradise, and the birds and streams left off singing, and all the flowers closed their petals. The scene itself was still there, a paradise of sorts, but the sun, its soul, was gone.

"Of course, I know it is only a silly tale," he was saying, when her mind cleared, and she seemed to take hold of things again, "but naturally I want to know what started it."

He wanted "to know what started it!" In the midst of the shock, in the midst of the sudden swift despair that had gripped her, she realised pitifully that he had not in truth swept the whole story aside as a monstrous lie; he held the opinion that there was something behind it, something that might possibly condemn her. Before he acquitted her entirely, he required an explanation.

And in that blinding moment of revelation, Kitt knew that her idol was shattered. She knew that Pat had never truly loved her; but only as one who seemed to him just so much better than the rest. Yet she clung pitifully to her dream, hoping against hope, refusing to let in the blackness beyond. Gulping down her dismay, she permitted herself a little plea.

"You surely don't suppose, Pat, that there is anything in the story I need to conceal?"

"Why, no—of course not—I only want you to say it is all a lie, so that I can tell Mrs. Strange."

And Kitt knew that was exactly what she could not do.

Then suddenly she asked: "Who is this Mrs. Strange? Has she a grudge against me?"

"No, of course, she hasn't. She doesn't even know you. She is a very nice lady I met in London. She spoke about you most kindly. She said it was such a shame for a story like this to have been repeated, and it was a good thing you were coming home to explain."

Kitt was silent, staring across the water, and something in her silence and the expression in her eyes disturbed him strangely. He fidgeted in his seat, and looked away from her.

"Well?" he said at last. "What shall I tell her? Who invented the story?"

"Does it matter very much what Mrs. Strange thinks?" she asked in a hollow voice.

He seemed momentarily arrested. "Well, of course——" he hesitated doubtfully, one hates anything like this. It has to be stopped."

"And supposing it can't be stopped?"

He gave a little nervous laugh. "But it can be, if it isn't true." He paused awkwardly. "If it isn't true," he repeated, as if to bolster his own assurance.

"Did it ever seem to you for a moment that it might be true?—as—as she appears to have repeated it?" She turned and looked into his face, and in her beautiful eyes there had come an expression that was almost tragic in its pain. He shrank a little, unable to face it.

"Of course not, Kitt. Why do you look like that?"

"I'm only thinking what I would have done in your place if I had loved the woman who was slandered."

He paled and fidgeted restlessly with his hands. "I'm ready to do anything—you know I am—when once I have your assurance, your disproof."

"I shouldn't have needed assurance or disproof. I should have carried them inside me."

He bit his lip at all her words implied, and wished she would be more direct, would come to the point and get it over. He did not understand her. She was an utter enigma to him. She seemed suddenly an entirely different person from the Kitt he had known of old. If she had stormed and raved he would have been on familiar ground at least. This girl with the veiled look of tragedy in her eyes perplexed and baffled him.

"Considering everything, Kitt, it isn't surely surprising that I want you to tell me how the story came to exist?"

"You mean that you want me to confirm your belief that it is all a lie?"

"Yes, of course."

"And what if I cannot confirm it?"

"But—but——" It was beyond him. He put up his hand and stroked the back of his head, frankly puzzled.

"I can't deny it all, but I'll tell you what happened," and she related the story of the fire and the hotel people's mistake.

Then she waited for him to speak.

"What an awful affair!" he said. "I never heard of such a thing in my life before." Then he, too, was silent.

"Well?" she said at last, unable to endure the suspense.

"What am I to tell this lady?" he asked with a worried air.

"What need you tell her but the truth?"

"She knew about the fire, and—and—some of the rest. She said all that mattered was for you to say this man was not—was not—in your room." He clenched his teeth and his hands. The mere speaking of it shocked him.

"But he *was* there," said honest Kitt, not seeing the subtle trap her enemy had laid for her.

"Good God!" murmured Pat, and stared in front of him. For he saw suddenly the deadly power of the trap. Whatever the explanation, no one could ever give the lie to that one damning fact.

She saw the strange expression on his face, and clutched his arm suddenly. "Why do you look like that, Pat? What are you thinking? Pat—Pat—tell me what you are thinking?"

For answer he rose and walked away a little distance, where he stood gazing over the bay. She stared after him with wide eyes, clutching the seat on either side of her. Then, because she could bear it no longer, she rose also, and went and stood beside him.

"Tell me what you are thinking!" she demanded in a low, resolute voice. "I *will* be told!"

All their lives Pat had been plastic, when she grew really angry. In his whole body he had not the force of character she had in her little finger.

"I don't think I know. It seems such a hopeless tangle altogether. Don't you see, I only wanted just to write and tell her that he wasn't—there? But he *was* there. You say he was. What *can* I tell her?"

Her anger turned to scorn. It was as though she took her own heart in her hands and wrung the blood drops out of it.

"And it's you, Patrick Mahon, my friend and my lover, who asks what you shall say? Is it for me to tell you how to defend my own honour? Are you so poor a man that you need a woman's help in this? Go back to this woman in London, whoever she may be, and tell her Kathleen Fitzgerald is not afraid of her cruel slander; because, before God, and before herself, she is unashamed." He flushed crimson at her tone, and would have spoken, but she stayed him peremptorily. "And for your own satisfaction, if you wish it, go and ask Norman Lutterworth for his version of the affair. It may at least help you to judge more fairly, since you evidently *must* judge."

"I don't want to judge," he burst in. "I—I—only want to think."

"God knows what you have been thinking already, ever since you heard the tale, and while I was coming back to you with all my heart full of love." Her voice broke, but she mastered it again—there would be time enough to weep in the years to come. "I haven't thought of any one but you while I've been away, Pat, and I believed—I believed——" Tears filled her eyes and threatened to overwhelm her.

He turned and opened his lips to speak, but no words came. Across a dividing gulf they looked at each other, knowing that some spectre had stepped between them.

"I've—I've—always loved you, Kitt," he breathed lamely. "I meant—I intended—I—thought we should get married some day."

She turned away. The hopes and dreams and pictures that had filled her life were something she would never tell him of now.

"Perhaps we'd better not say any more," she said. "I expect you thought it was love, and—and—all the time it wasn't—it was only friendship."

He put out his hand to stop her, but she took no heed. With bowed head, for it was as though this last blow had struck her to the dust, she walked slowly away from him and vanished into the house.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FORSAKEN.

SEVERAL days passed. Twice Pat called at Kitt's house, only to be received by old Biddy in a very uncompromising attitude. She told him Miss Kathleen was not well, and in the telling implied that she was quite capable of taking care of her without any help from him.

Not that Biddy had any personal dislike to Pat; indeed, she had always looked upon him as Miss Kathleen's future husband, and rather favoured him; but the broken condition of her treasure after the morning they had parted in the garden excluded every other thought in the world. All Biddy's efforts were concentrated upon trying to manufacture something her "darlint" could be induced to eat.

But she did not succeed very well, and behind the lowered blinds Kitt was breaking her heart. It seemed in those dreadful days that every one she loved in the world had forsaken her, save old Biddy; and only enemies and a cruel following fate remained. Evidently she could not escape that following fate.

On one side of the Atlantic or the other it sought her out and found her. Yet even that would not have mattered if Pat had not failed her. Just why he had failed her she was not entirely clear, but she knew without any shadow of doubt that his love had been of poor quality, and that sooner or later she must have found it out.

What, then, was there left to live for? Was it possible that she was meant to live out her years alone there, with

only her sad memories and her sad heart for company?—With, perhaps, the following fate haunting her still?—People in the street looking askance—Slander breathing behind closed doors—slander that she had no weapon to fight? There were hours when she felt that she could not face life, hours when the full tide of misery surged over her, and she only cried out that she might die. All that she had lived for through the past months was shattered in the one dreadful hour of revelation. All her hopes and dreams were gone

Gone was her idol with them. Worse still, perhaps, her love was gone. She sometimes thought, if only she could love him still—love him and forgive him. But her own strong heart shrank from the feebleness of his. He had shattered her dream, and he had shattered her love, leaving only an aching, quivering, empty despair. And now that the scales were fallen from her eyes, she saw other failings that had seemed of no account before. His slothfulness, his self-centred life, his indolent temperament—these probably made it impossible for him to love her or any one as she conceived love. But memory of the shattered idol did not ease her despair. In some ways it aggravated it. Surely, since everything had failed her, there was nothing left to live for.

In a sense Pat was not much better off. He, too, was miserable to the extent of his capacity; and if that capacity were somewhat shallow, perhaps it made little difference in the end if the deepest depth were touched.

After three days he did what was for him a considerable thing. He sat down and wrote two letters: one to Mrs. Strange in London, telling her that Miss Fitzgerald had returned, that he knew the story was a base misrepresentation of fact, and he was afraid she was ill; the other to Norman Lutterworth, asking him if he could arrange to see him. After a few days' delay he received replies. Mrs. Strange merely wrote that she was very glad he was satisfied, but it seemed unfortunate that he could not deny the story outright. The tone of the letter roused him to momentary fury, but he felt helpless to cope with it.

The other reply came from Norman's steward, and informed him that Mr. Lutterworth had gone abroad and that the date of his return was indefinite, but that the letter would be placed before him when he came home.

So now there seemed nothing left for him but to sit down and wait until Kitt would see him. In the first shock of their quarrel he felt he wanted her more than before. But as the days passed, and no message came to him, he took up the old, idle, pleasuring life again, and found solace. He had grown accustomed to being without her companionship; and he was unspeakably lazy. Yet he still cared for her, and believed that by and by everything would come right. But Kitt, in her own little domain, turned her face to the wall and refused to be comforted. A dear dream, a radiant hope, had blessed her life. It was gone. There was nothing left that mattered. She crouched over her fire, for it was a cold May in Donegal, and longed for evening that the day might end. And if sometimes she thought of Norman, at first it was almost with an added bitterness, that it should have been he, and not Pat, who could love so generously and whole-heartedly.

By what strange freak had that selfish passenger, so eager for his own comfort on the voyage to Canada, proved that when once stirred he could love beyond other men, while the love of the amiable, laughing Pat collapsed feebly at the first obstacle?

And then perhaps would follow a recollection of what that other man's love had been. How dauntlessly he had followed her, and refused to be repulsed! How insistently he had forgiven all the scorn and waywardness she had shown him! Broken phrases, half-forgotten, re-echoed in her ears, phrases in which he had mocked at the thought of her escaping him, and boasted gently of how he would win her in spite of herself, and guard her against all the world.

She remembered the time when he had pinned her arms to her side and kissed her on the lips. It made her face flush crimson only to think of it. It filled her with indignation; and yet, after all these months, the memory

was still curiously mixed with an unaccountable thrill. Ah! if he had transgressed flagrantly against every canon of good behaviour, at least he had made her feel that his love was no feeble counterfeit; that it was the love of a strong man and no weakling; that it was the love a woman might glory in, surrender to fearlessly, and rest in unafraid. But not for her! She had driven him away because she did not love him nor want him—because, already, her heart had been given to the weakling.

Oh! the bitter humiliation of that weakness in the beloved! It is said that women love weakness, and gravitate naturally to the man who needs mothering; but if so, Kitt was not of them. Perhaps a shrewd instinct had told Norman so. That rough determined kiss of his, given whether she would or no, made her hot and angry and indignant; but what was that beside the humiliation of feebleness? It seemed now as if Pat had neither the strength of mind to love her nor *unlove* her; he merely drifted with the tide. If she answered to certain old-fashioned requirements, why, he loved her and would be pleased to marry her. If she came short of his standard, he preferred to change his mind. It was the standard and the idea that he loved—not the woman. But for her he could have committed a crime, become a felon; she would not have changed. She would have gloried in standing by him, if he had loved her and wanted her. She felt she could have forgiven him anything except just that one thing—feebleness, and the feeling that he had loved her only because she happened to be there, not for her own self with all her faults and failings, her aggravating moods as well as her winsome ones.

After six days, strong now in her misery, she consented to see him for a little while.

He came in looking sheepish and uncomfortable, and started when he saw how unnaturally large her eyes looked in her thin, worn face. Then in a bungling, halting way he tried to tell her that he knew it was all right, and that he was sorry he had upset her so. Encouraged by her silence he ran on, and she gathered

from the halting phrases that he was prepared to overlook the difficulty, and let things be as they had hoped.

If he had not been the friend and playmate of all her life, as well as her dream-lover, she could have flung scorn upon his words. But it was only with Norman that she gave rein to her will, and hurled her darts. With Pat it was different. Her heart made excuses for him, whatever she felt. So she only turned to him wearily, and looked at him with her sad, shadowy eyes.

"I don't feel the same now, Pat. I couldn't possibly marry you. Somehow, everything is changed. I shall always love you, because of all we have been to each other since we were mites; but it isn't the same. Something has died inside me. I can't explain. I'm just tired of it all. I feel as if I should never be anything but tired again."

"It is staying indoors all the time. You should get out into the fresh air." It was a clumsy attempt at comfort; she knew he meant it well, but his non-comprehension could still hurt her sorely. He knew nothing of the agony of loss that was breaking her spirit.

"Perhaps," she answered. "I must try and go out to-morrow."

He came and stood beside her, touched by her evident suffering, for she looked a wreck, compared with the radiant girl who had come gaily home.

"Will you think it over, Kitt? I mean what I say."

Her heart laughed within her at that, silently, secretly. He meant it—this feeble offer to overlook the difficulty, and go on as before!

Oh! where was that fierce, resolute man who flung her scorn back at her, and cared neither for taunts, nor slander, nor faults, so long as she was just herself, the one woman in all the world for him?

"It doesn't need thinking over, Pat. I understand you better than you understand yourself. We are not suited to each other in the least. We made a

mistake—at least, I did. I shall not change now. I shall just live on here alone.”

He fidgeted awkwardly. “It will be very lonely.”

She glanced at him half curiously. How strangely little he understood her, if he thought she would marry from fear of loneliness.

“I don’t mind that. Many women are lonely.”

So at last he turned to go. And at the door he stood a moment in hesitation.

“I—I—wrote to ask Mr. Lutterworth if I could see him.”

She raised her head with a startled expression.

“What did you do that for?”

“I thought I would like to see him—that’s all.”

“How did you get his address?”

“From Mrs. Strange.”

“Does Mrs. Strange know Norman Lutterworth?” in incredulous tones.

“Yes, I thought I told you—she is his aunt.”

“Ah!” There was a world of expression in the monosyllable. She remembered now. Norman had been going to marry his cousin, Hester Strange, and of course he had broken off the engagement. She remembered he had said it was an engagement made to please his aunt.

“Why do you say ‘Ah!’ like that?”

“Nothing,” and she shook her head. “It just explains things a little. Are you going to see Mr. Lutterworth?”

“No. His steward replied to the letter saying he had gone abroad, indefinitely.”

Again she seemed arrested by his news.

“Did he say where?”

“No. That was all. You didn’t—know?”

“No. We—we—seldom correspond. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye.”

He was gone and she sat alone—how alone!

The last link was snapped now. She had sent him away for good. No need for him to brace himself to overlook the difficulty any more.

And Norman had gone to—gone away somewhere

abroad, indefinitely. And Lionel, poor Lionel, with his fevered devotion was dead. And there were long years ahead to be lived through, such long years, and so many of them, with idols shattered, and hopes dead, and dreams merely "sand-foam and sea-drift."

In the shaded room she leaned her head on her arms and wept silently.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NORMAN SHOWS HIS RESOURCEFULNESS.

NORMAN had been gone four days when Patrick's letter reached Lutterworth Manor. Mrs. Lutterworth glanced at the cramped handwriting, decided it was business, and put it with a little pile awaiting the steward. Later on the steward briefly replied to it, and filed it to await Norman's return.

Nearly half-way across the Atlantic Norman lounged in his deck chair and gazed at the waves. As of yore he firmly chilled all efforts at social intercourse, but he was not now monopolising the warmest and sunniest spot. That was significant to any one who knew his habits. He was a little amused about it himself. He perceived that it indicated more than met the eye. For one thing, Kitt had effectually dragged him, in more senses than one, out of the careless irresponsibility engendered by sunny warmth when she sent him into the bleak highways of life to follow his quest.

Well, he could honestly thank her for it. The sunny warmth could pall, just as truly as the bitter blasts. Variation was the salt of life.

He was thinking of that when the deck steward brought him a telegram—a wireless message from England. How odd it seemed, this communicating in mid-ocean with distant people! He opened it without feeling much interest. Something from the steward, no doubt, about a horse, or a tenant, or the pedigree stock.

Then suddenly he was all attention; as if he doubted his own eyes; he read it over two or three times. It ran:

"Miss Fitzgerald in Donegal. I fear in trouble. Better come back. Will write Liverpool.—HESTER."

He started up ; and all his soul was immediately racked with a swift sense of impotence. She was at home, in Donegal—and he was tearing through the water *away from her* ! He felt as if he must shout to them to stop the ship, to turn it round and go back. This racing, pulsing, throbbing, through the waves in the wrong direction was maddening.

A little later wireless messages swept the seas. To every ship within hail they said : “ Can you approach to take off passenger for England ? Urgent. Money no object.”

It might have comforted Kitt’s sore heart a little if she had seen how that fierce, resolute lover of hers grappled with the situation, and fought against unlucky chance to get back to her. But he might as well have saved his sovereigns, for high seas and a great Atlantic swell held the ocean for the next few days, and no homeward bound ship would heed his cry. To send a little boat for him in those waves was almost impossible. Money might be no object, but life was. None cared to risk it. But a little comfort came before they reached the mouth of the St. Lawrence. An Allan Line steamer, due to leave Quebec half an hour before they arrived, would wait that half-hour for him. The Canadian Pacific agents had won the concession for their old and regular client. Then there was the suspense of winning that half-hour. The captain promised he would do it if he could, but it might not be humanly possible in that heaving swell. The only relief was that they could report progress. How marvellously this wonder of the age had simplified some conditions ! No miserable hours of suspense as to whether the Allan boat had gone without him. For a little money he could ask as often as he liked. So he knew, as they drew up the St. Lawrence, that she was still waiting. And when Quebec, with all its romantic interest, rose from the river brink, straight ahead of them, he knew that though they were forty minutes behind time, she had not yet gone. And as they hove-to, there were Canadian Pacific officials waiting with porters, everything in readiness for the quickest possible exchange. How he

blessed them for it, showering gold and silver about him ! By special arrangement he and his baggage were taken off the ship before any of the usual preliminaries. And when the passengers saw him step on to the pier, they gave him a rousing cheer.

No one knew why he was moving heaven and earth to get back to England, but his determination appealed to them. In some way they liked him. Though he had been consistently unsociable coming over, they were all glad that he caught the homeward-bound ship, impatiently waiting for nearly an hour past her time.

Hester, in England, was the most pleased of all. She adored Norman now, as she never might have done as his wife. His wireless message had rejoiced her. "Returning first possible opportunity. Bless you." She had so longed to be of service to him, and now undoubtedly she had been. She had had to stifle her conscience to do it, but she did not greatly mind that. It happened through the letter Pat had written to Mrs. Strange.

Hester saw that her mother had a letter from Killybegs, and the fact rather interested her. She had been puzzled at her mother's sudden friendship for Pat, and had seen too little of him herself to glean the reason for it. When Mrs. Strange opened the letter and read it, Hester was watching, and she saw an expression of triumph come over her face. She knew her mother too well not to divine immediately that some little scheme of hers had been successful. But what ? And how came Patrick Mahon in it ?

"Have you a letter from Mr. Mahon ?" she asked.

"Yes." The tone was non-committal, but Mrs. Strange added as an afterthought, "He wants to sell me a dog," which was not clever of Dora Strange in dealing with her own daughter, who knew her, alas ! too well.

Hester's lips curled secretly.

Vulgarly, she could not "swallow the dog."

"Whatever for ?" she asked.

"A sporting dog, I thought Norman might like."

As Hester knew perfectly well that her mother and

Norman were not on speaking terms, this was absurd on the face of it, but it somehow gave her the notion that the letter affected Norman. That covert smile of triumph in the beginning seemed to suggest a scheme against her cousin. But how could she find out? On the pretence of reading the newspaper, she stayed in the dining-room longer than usual to try and watch what became of the letter; and presently she saw her mother put it with others in a pigeonhole of her writing-table. Having seen that, she departed. Later in the morning, when her mother was out shopping, she returned in search of the letter, and, for love of Norman, stifled her conscience, and read it through. Just at first she could not grasp what it meant. Then suddenly she saw the whole plot. Patrick Mahon was a friend of Norman's Kathleen Fitzgerald, and her mother had discovered it when he was in London. The remainder she could easily unravel. Obviously, her mother had tried to poison Mr. Mahon's mind against Miss Fitzgerald, hoping he would spread her cruel version of the Montreal story, and, in so doing, anger and hurt Norman.

Hester knew all about the story from Norman himself, and about Kathleen also. She knew why he had gone to Canada again, and about his restless anxiety. From Patrick's letter she gained two points, that for the time dwarfed all others: one, that Kathleen had already returned home; the other, that Patrick was worried about her because she seemed ill. Hester had developed marvellously since she was allowed to be happy. Instead of being timidly docile under the sway of a domineering woman, she had grown self-dependent and full of resource.

She immediately went out and sent that wireless message after Norman on the high seas.

Kitt need not have wept quite such bitter tears the afternoon she sent Pat away finally, thinking that all had forsaken her, and that she must fight even that following fate alone. For at that very hour, in mid-ocean, a resolute man, who was her sworn friend whether she would or no, was bombarding every ship within call with his plea to be taken back to England at any

cost. In a happier hour she would have smiled over the picture. What a violent person he was ! Because he found himself in mid-ocean on a ship going the wrong way, he must immediately disturb every ship he could get at, with a calm request that they would go out of their course to pick him up and take him home again. Just then it must have appealed to her very specially, after poor Pat had awkwardly offered—more or less—to forgive her—for a thing she had not done !

But the homeward-bound ships in mid-ocean would have none of this determined person, whoever he might be, since he could only be acquired at grave risk ; and while Kitt crouched over her lonely hearth with a weariness that seemed as if it must last for ever and ever, Norman was forcibly carried further away from her.

But a fortnight later saw him back again in Liverpool, and making a hasty dash for Lutterworth Manor before he crossed to Ireland.

When he arrived home this time, the old retainers had occasion to remark upon his improved spirits ; for the master had been very quiet and preoccupied of late. His mother, on the other hand, thought he must have taken leave of his senses. She was so bewildered, poor lady, with this dashing about in ships. How could any one, not a little deranged, go all the way to Canada for five minutes ?

“ But what did you go for, dear, if you didn’t want to stop ? ” she asked plaintively.

“ Oh, just for fun, mother ! ” And he laughed over her pathetic face—laughed in a way in which he had seldom laughed of late. For he had received Hester’s explanation now, and was able to read into it more than she could. Obviously, Mrs. Strange had repeated things in her own particular fashion to Patrick Mahon, and it looked uncommonly as if Patrick had been fool enough to listen to them. He hoped with all his heart that he had—hoped sincerely that he had proved himself the biggest fool God ever created. Because if so, it was more than likely that Mrs. Strange’s effort to injure and annoy him (Norman) had done him the greatest service possible.

The very fact that Pat wished to see him, suggested that there was trouble over in Donegal. So much the better if there were.

Let her find out what these weaklings were ! Lionel with his pretty face and engaging manners, and, behind it all, the lack of balance ! Pat, with his foolish heed of a third person's story, no doubt wanting to hear Norman's version as well ! As if it could matter with a girl like Kathleen. Didn't every line of her, and expression of her, and glance of her, set forth in the plainest possible language her transparent honesty and sterling worth ? He dreamed of her eagerly and impatiently, at the open French window of his den, filling his nostrils with the delicious night scents of May. And those favourite lines came back to his mind, though this time he repeated them with an expression almost of content :

" There will no man do for your sake, I think,
What I would have done for the least word said.
I had wrung life dry for your lips to drink,
Broken it up for your daily bread :

Body for body and blood for blood,
As the flow of the full sea risen to flood
That yearns and trembles before it sink,
I had given, and lain down for you, glad and dead." . . .

Yet he knew that he was by no means sure of her. She had still to be won, and coaxed and tempted into the grand old Manor House, like a little independent bird into a cage, by some one who only wanted to take care of it and guard it against its enemies.

But surely the goal was nearer than it had ever been before. One last careful move, one more instance for her of his reliability and resolve, one more dash at a critical turning-point, and the citadel might be won, while mothers looked on with plaintive, bewildered eyes, aunts wrung hands in impotent fury, and undecided young Irishmen stayed to ask questions.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PAT IS AMAZED.

IT was evening when Norman arrived at Killybegs, so he took his things to the hotel and established himself there. After dinner he went for a walk, and feasted his eyes on the lovely lights and the curious formation of sand hills that form the little Lough. Later, he smoked a cigar on the seat outside the hotel, in order to get into conversation with some of the residents idling around and learn a little about the neighbourhood. Thus he discovered that Kitt's home was two miles away, near Fintra Bay, and that she was there alone with an old housekeeper. The next day he ordered a jaunting car for the early afternoon, and had an uncomfortable drive, for to be comfortable in an Irish jaunting car is an acquired art.

When the long, low house was pointed out to him, he stood for a moment gazing at it silently, conscious of an inward thrill unlike anything that he had ever known before. Then he sent the car away, saying he should walk back.

As he approached the house there were no signs of any one being about. It looked so deserted, he half feared it must be empty.

Then at the back he saw old Biddy, and guessing at once who she was, went round to speak to her. Old Biddy eyed him curiously. Apparently, she rather liked the look of him, for she made no demur about letting him see her young mistress. Yes, she was there in the house, very lonesome, and greetin' a little; she would go and tell her the gintleman had come.

Norman made a mistake then. He produced half a sovereign from somewhere very handy, and making as though he would slip it into her hand, said, "Let me go and find her for myself. I am an old friend of Miss Fitzgerald's."

Biddy rather indignantly put her hand behind her. "If ye's a friend of Miss Kathleen's, that can maybe bring back the smiles and the life to me darlint, I'm not wantin' any gold for it."

Norman retrieved his mistake splendidly.

With a kindly little laugh, he gripped her hand. "I believe I can," he said; "I believe *you* and *I can*, together. There's my hand on it."

Biddy eyed him admiringly, and a little awed by his condescension, and enlisted herself among his supporters for ever. Then she showed him the door into the long, low sitting-room, where Kitt spent most of her days.

And that day had been a bad one for Kitt. The awful loneliness of her position was telling on her nerves, and breaking down her spirit. How was she to know to whom else the story had been told? How was she to know, if she went to the little seaport, that the very people in the street would not look askance at her? She almost wondered if she would ever care to leave her own little domain again. The glorious sails she had pictured with Pat seemed swept away for ever. How could she ever sail with him again, with this hopeless thing between them? How pace the moors with him, with her face held high to the sweet, fresh breezes?

What was she to do with her life at all, at all? was her low lament, sitting beside the window, gazing out over the bay, with the tragic sorrow of the Celt in her eyes.

She did not hear when Norman opened the door and stepped in; or if she did, she thought it was only Biddy. So he was able to look at her for a full minute. And all his life, he thought, he would never forget that picture. The very droop of her shoulders stabbed him; the listless hands, the bowed head, the sad eyes gazing only upon a world of grey shadows, a world that had forsaken her. He had seen her sorrowful on the ship, withdrawing into

herself, and looking at the world about her as from some sad shore that was peculiarly her own; but in those days there had still been Pat, and there had *not* been the following fate. There had been in those days no thought of a broken spirit.

Norman could see plainly the traces of many a night when she must have wept quietly; and it stabbed his heart afresh to note how her radiant look of health had left her, and all her freshness, and much of her beauty. Yet, never at any moment of his love had she been quite so dear. When he had overcome the shock of seeing her so changed, and felt entirely master of himself, he stepped forward, and attracted her attention with a cough.

Kitt looked up with a start, and when she saw who it was, she went deathly pale one moment and crimsoned to the roots of her hair the next.

"You!" she exclaimed a little breathlessly. "You!"

"Yes. Are you surprised? I told you I should come if you did not write." He came and stood near her, looking down with eyes that could not hide their love, though he strove to speak as a friend only.

"They said—that is—I heard—that you had gone abroad."

"Yes. Didn't you guess where?" His voice was very winning. "It shouldn't have been very difficult, Kathleen."

In her utter forlornness and loneliness his unswerving devotion, the tone of his voice, were music to her, whether she would or no. But the old spirit still lived.

"I did not try to guess. I—I—was not interested."

Norman could not resist a low laugh.

"No, of course, you wouldn't be, Kathleen. Still it was rather an interesting trip. I started for Canada three weeks ago, and spent exactly five minutes there."

"Canada!" she echoed, thrown off her guard.

"Of course. Where else should I go?"

She had no answer to that, so he ran on: "I went because you did not answer my last letter. I told you I should come if you did not answer my letters. You'd

be finding out that I'm a man of my word, Kathleen. Do you remember the last time we were together?"

It was a daring stroke, but it told. Kitt crimsoned again. She remembered that it was just before they parted he had taken those kisses.

The little thrill ran through her. It made her pull herself together, and even if it meant battle, Norman knew it was a good sign—anything to raise her from her despondent lethargy! Even now he wanted no tame, lifeless surrender of a broken spirit. The little defiant expression that struggled into her face delighted him.

"Ah, I see you haven't quite forgotten! There are several things to make good, Kathleen, aren't there? I mean things I said I should achieve."

He pulled an arm-chair forward and sat on the arm of it. He liked being above her. He could see the long, silken lashes against her white cheeks, and the dear, dark head, and up there he could gaze as much as he wished.

"Don't you want to know how I discovered so quickly that you were not in Canada? It's rather interesting."

She made no comment, but he saw a little nervous movement of her hands, that a moment ago had been so listless. He felt that the spirit of her was struggling back. He had only to give her time.

"I've a little cousin—Hester Strange. There was an idea of my marrying her once—until I made up my mind to marry some one else! She and I are great pals now. Better than we ever should have been the other way, I expect! She found out—through a letter of Patrick Mahon's to her mother . . . *Your Pat!*"

There was just the suggestion of a tender taunt: he must sting that lethargy away. And he saw the mobile lips grow a little firmer. It was another hit that told.

"Hester knew I had gone to Canada to see why you didn't answer my last letter. She knew I was feeling worried and anxious about you. She also saw, from the letter to her mother, that you were in trouble. Hester is a shrewd little person: and she knows me pretty well now. She knew I should simply hate to waste

time going to Canada when all the while you were here in Donegal. So she sent a wireless message after me, to tell me what she had discovered.

"Heavens, Kathleen! You almost had to answer for a mutiny on that ship! I felt as if I longed to buy all the crew over to my side, and then hold a revolver to the Captain's head, until he gave the order to turn round and go full speed ahead for England. I was a born and bred pirate in those first minutes. Nothing but the subduing effect of modern conditions stayed me. As it was, I sent wireless messages flying over the ocean, to get a homeward-bound ship to stop and pick me up. None of them would, but an Allan Line steamer waited for me at Quebec, and I came straight back."

A thought crept like a traitor into Kitt's mind: "This is a man indeed. What a pity that I cannot love him." And still she sat silently in her low chair, looking across the bay. Norman leaned towards her, and there was deep tenderness in his voice as he changed his tactics suddenly, and said: "You little Irish girl, you've been crying!"

It came so unexpectedly that some of her defences gave way: her lips quivered, and she turned her head aside that he might not see her eyes swim suddenly in tears. The longing to take her in his arms and comfort her, almost mastered him; but the time for that was not yet. He sat rigidly still a moment, getting himself in hand again. Kitt thought he was waiting for her to speak.

"I—I—haven't been very well," she faltered.

"Somebody has been worrying you, I suppose; and now, perhaps, you think I've come to worry you on the top of all the rest? But I haven't, little girl; on my honour, I haven't! I only want to stand by, like the lifeboat in a stormy sea—in case I'm wanted. If the ship can take care of itself, the lifeboat will retire again. You see, it is the lifeboat's duty to be ready to stand by a ship in distress. And—because of how the distress might arise with you—I consider it my duty to stand by. Incidentally, it is also my very great delight—but that does not interest you. Of course, I know that

trouble has arisen through the malice of my aunt, Mrs. Strange. But I'm not going to tease you to tell me about it to-day. It will keep, I dare say. Some other time you will tell me, and we will tear the thing to shreds together. . . . I'm staying at the hotel in Killybegs. I always had a wish to see Donegal, and I look upon it as a lucky chance that you happen to be domiciled here." He said it well, considering he had scarcely even heard of Donegal until last autumn!

"While I was in Dublin," continued the Liar blandly, "I inquired about a car. I expect it will arrive to-morrow. Have generous moods occasionally, won't you, Kathleen? Much as I want to see Donegal, I shall hate motoring alone." He gave her a moment to grasp the sudden change of events, then ran on: "Couldn't we switch one of them on now? I mean the generous moods. I'd so love a cup of tea."

She rose at once, and all her bearing seemed invigorated. "I'm sorry. I did not know it was nearly tea-time. There's only Biddy to do things, and she's rather slow, and not very tidy. You won't mind, I hope!"

"Mind Biddy! Why, Biddy and I are friends already. Do you remember when we got the cocoa together, Kathleen, after that iniquitous entertainment? You tried to be very awe-inspiring, but you didn't succeed much better than Miss Forsyth-Hope does. By the way, how is her Majesty?"

"She has never forgiven you for leaving without saying good-bye to her; nor me for letting you go." There was actually a spot of colour in Kitt's white face now. "She had promised herself a *tête-à-tête* walk with you in the afternoon, arrayed in all her best clothes, to strike frenzied jealousy into the heart of every boy in Kneeller."

"Ah! Ah!" Norman laughed at the mere recollection of the small, snub-nosed apparition, and Kitt smiled. It was so nice of Norman to be in the one mood that she liked. She felt grateful to him. She had not the least idea how that hovering smile set his pulses racing; how he was noting every line and every expres-

sion; how under the cloak of this pleasant, natural friendliness, he was marshalling every force he ever possessed to win the little bird into the Cage of Safety.

"Why shouldn't we get our own tea?" he suggested boldly. "It's just as simple as getting cocoa." He guessed she often did things of that sort for herself since Biddy was getting old and rheumatically, and he wanted to win a familiar footing in the funny old house quickly.

Kitt seemed amused.

"We don't allow our guests to wait on themselves in Donegal."

"Then let's call it Canada for half an hour! What's in a name, anyway?"

She smiled again, and they went out together to hunt for cups and saucers. But she would not allow him to go into the kitchen and scandalise Biddy.

"You must wait in the sitting-room while I get the teapot," she said, and hurried off.

Biddy almost gasped when she saw her "darlint" —for life had come back into her face and into her form, back into her very hands, as busily they prepared the tea. But she was far too wise to make any comment, beyond a slightly familiar whisper to the Lord Almighty, as Kitt went off with her teapot: "Dear God in heaven, an old woman's blessing on ye, for this day's work for me darlint!"

Alone in the sitting-room a sudden longing expression filled Norman's eyes. He looked round the shabby, old-fashioned room, noting every detail, and picturing her within it, and realising how dear it must be to her. Ah! would she ever leave it all behind? Say good-bye to it, and leave it to go and live in one of England's finest old manor houses—with him? The picture of a man in naval uniform caught his attention, and he crossed the room to observe it more closely. When Kitt carried in the teapot, he was still looking at it. He turned to her, and their eyes met; and something in his seemed to soften her as she had never softened to him before.

"Yes, that is father," she said simply.

He looked back at the picture critically.

"He looks a man to be proud of," he answered her quietly, and Kitt blessed him in silence.

Then they sat down to tea together, and he made her tell him anecdotes of "Miss Forsyth-Hope," till she was laughing almost without knowing it. Thus it happened that they were both laughing when Pat knocked, unheeded. Puzzled at the unlooked-for sound, he opened the door and walked in. And when he saw them at the tea-table together, he experienced an unpleasant shock. For, though Kitt still looked worn and ill, she had lost the air of hopeless sadness she had worn of late, and one could more easily imagine the radiant creature who had stepped from the train that first evening, and ran to him with outstretched hands; and Pat knew, to the bottom of his soul, that it was through no act of his the hopeless sadness had hidden its head, though it was by his act that it had enfolded her. She blanched a little when she saw him, and put down her tea-cup suddenly.

Norman glanced round, and seeing a handsome young Irishman with a weak mouth, and a general suggestion of carelessness about his clothes and his appearance, guessed immediately who he was.

Pat came forward. "How are you, Kitt? I just came round to bring some snipe. I did not know you had a visitor."

"I'm very well, Pat. Thank you for the snipe. This is Mr. Lutterworth."

"Mr. Lutterworth!" Pat repeated in amazement.

"Yes. How do you do?" and Norman rose and held out his hand. "You wrote to me, I think, and my steward told you I had gone abroad. So I had, but I came back hurriedly, on—on—business."

Patrick murmured something unintelligible as they sat down, and Norman ran on easily: "Directly I saw your letter, I guessed it was something to do with my aunt, Mrs. Strange. My cousin told me you had all met in London. Very odd, wasn't it? I was sorry" (Oh, Norman!) "because my aunt has what I call a wicked tongue—there is really no other word for it. She can persuade a person that black is white, and white

black, better than any one I know. I expect she told you about that little Montreal affair between Miss Fitzgerald and myself, as if it were some dreadful, overwhelming fate. I know her way so well. And all the time it was really rather amusing, wasn't it?" He turned gaily to Kitt, who was so taken aback that she found herself following his lead, almost before she knew it.

"It might easily have been a tragedy, though," she responded in the same vein. "I wonder the whole hotel wasn't burnt down."

To say that Pat was knocked out of time is to put it mildly. There wasn't a breath of wind, not even a flap, left in his sails. If they had left the subject alone, or waited for him (Pat) to introduce it, he would have understood, but positively to drag it forward, and put it down in front of him, so to speak, and tell him to have a good look at it, was a line he was not in the least prepared for.

"That's about the size of it all, isn't it?" finished Norman cheerfully.

"Y—yes," agreed poor Pat lamely.

"Well, you can take it from me, Mr. Mahon, no one who knows my aunt ever takes the least notice of what she says. She is one of those women who love a piece of gossip, and she always embroiders things for her own special delectation. It's a tiresome habit, but we are all used to it, and we take no notice.

"If a thing has been said by Aunt Dora, that is quite sufficient reason for disbelieving the whole story. I'm sorry to have to say this of one of my own relatives; but, after all, we don't choose them for ourselves—and there isn't the slightest doubt my Aunt Dora Strange is the greatest liar unhung."

Pat gave a little gasp, and Kitt looked past him somewhat coldly. As there has been occasion to remark before, she was very much a woman. And no woman could possibly resist a little sensation of triumph, when the man who had weakly hurt her was utterly routed without a word to say for himself.

There was a moment's uncomfortable silence, and

then Norman went on airily, as if the matter were not worth considering any further :

"Did you say you had been snipe-shooting? I expect you get good sport here. I'm particularly fond of it. If I might come out with you one day, I can easily wire for my gun."

"I shall be very pleased," said Pat, seeing he was expected to answer, and not quite sure yet whether he was on his head or his heels. "Are you—are you—staying in Donegal?"

"I've got a room at the hotel at Killybegs for the present. I heard it was a good centre, and I want to run round the country generally. I've a car coming from Dublin to-morrow. I think I must have a boat, too. I had no idea it was such a good place for sailing. Can I get a good one here, or shall I have to send to Belfast? My own yacht is rather too large."

"You have a yacht?" Pat began to grow interested.

"I believe I've two"—he laughed a little—"but I'm not at all sure where they are. My skipper has probably gone on a honeymoon in one. I shouldn't like to take his character away, but I'm sometimes afraid he has rather a weakness for honeymoons."

"I'm thinking of buying a new one," Pat told him, with almost a friendly air.

"You're going to buy a new yacht, Pat?" asked Kitt in surprise.

"Yes. I—I've come in to a little money." It was significant that he had not told her this before. "And I guess the old *Water Lily* is about done for."

Then Norman broke in again, for in Kitt's eyes he saw a pained look that escaped Pat.

"I'm sure I'm very glad to hear it, for Miss Fitzgerald has told me blood-curdling tales of the escapes from a watery grave you have had in her. But, in the meantime, I hope you'll both come out with me. I don't know that I won't send for my smaller one. I only thought that with the car"—he glanced at Kitt—"one can sail anywhere; but I *must* see Donegal, after all I've heard."

"I thought I'd get a little car as well," put in

Pat modestly, and again Kitt opened her eyes in surprise.

Then the two men fell to discussing cars, and considering that neither of them knew anything about them, they manufactured quite a creditable conversation on the subject. At last Pat got up, and said he had to be in Killybegs by six.

"It's time I went also," said Norman, rising. "I am going to walk back. How do you go?"

"I've a bicycle, but I know it's punctured, and will have to be blown up every five minutes. I'd just as soon walk."

Finally, they went off together, and Kitt watched them go as if she could scarcely believe her own eyes. Then her glance wandered over the dear, familiar scene, and she found that she was looking at a world to which the sunlight was coming back.

Lastly she moved across the room, and picking up her father's portrait, laid her cheek against it.

"He said you looked like a man to be proud of, dear," she whispered. "I shall have to forgive him a good deal for that."

CHAPTER XXX.

"MY QUEEN!"

THE next month passed almost like a dream. Norman stayed on at the hotel, with a car and a yacht to amuse him, and Kitt and Pat for companions. Very little was said any more about the incident of Pat and Mrs. Strange. Norman easily saw what had happened, and thanked the gods they had created Pat a fool. If he knew Kitt aright, she would not easily forgive any one who had failed her at a critical moment, as Pat had; even though it began to be apparent that Pat regretted the line he had taken for more reasons than one.

It was a lovely June, and only lovers of Donegal know and truly appreciate how lovely summers can be in that land of mountains and moorlands, with its deeply indented coast, its massive, magnificent headlands, and its wondrous array of flowers. All over the country they motored together, with an Irish chauffeur who caused them endless amusement, and generally with Pat as well. Norman encouraged Pat to come; for he meant to go slowly with his wooing. He felt he would win her more entirely that way. So Kitt's defences gave way so gradually that she hardly knew they were going. After her strenuous mental experiences in the last year, she was only glad to bask a little in the quiet pleasures that offered. If she stopped to question her own heart, she was conscious of an indefinable shyness that was a little unnerving, and put the moment of self-examination off yet again. Norman seemed to have grown wonderfully patient, and in the

meantime they were all enjoying themselves. Yet sometimes, when she met his eyes unexpectedly, and knew that he had been watching her, she felt very keenly that his patience was not of the kind that would last much longer. And she had declared that she hated him, and would always hate him, and would never forgive him! What could a proud, self-respecting Irish lassie do after that?

In the end, according to her own account afterwards, she did nothing at all. It was all done for her. The climax was reached and passed with incredible swiftness and suddenness, in Norman's best and most masterful style. There was a significant moment in the afternoon, when Pat attempted to push in front of him to perform some little service for her. And Norman, somehow, ruled him aside as if he did not count, and waited upon Kitt as if it were his absolute right. Pat flushed a little angrily, and afterwards sulked. When they reached Kitt's home later, he refused to go in, and went off to his own place. Norman went in to supper as arranged, and over the unconventional meal he still waited on her with an air of possession.

Kitt felt that she liked that better than she dare acknowledge. Afterwards they went outside, for it was a lovely warm evening. Somewhere in the house they could hear old Biddy washing up plates and dishes, and murmuring to herself as she did so. Outside there was not a soul about; only a garden of delicious night scents, and a few stars hanging over the mountains, waiting for the dark. Long trails of crimson were still in the sky, and a vision of pale eau-de-nil above the fading glory in the west. For a little time they sat very quietly. It was as if the earth were waiting; they, too, were waiting, and a hushed spell wrapped them round. Kitt held her breath before the beauty of the scene, and in her heart there was a dawning content. She knew that the miseries and terrors of the last year were passing away from her life. Norman felt himself as one standing upon the threshold of his heart's desire, and yet loth to break the spell of the perfect moment.

Then suddenly he spoke to her of Lionel. It was a subject they had both avoided.

"I didn't like to ask you before," he said; "you seemed to have so many other painful thoughts."

He saw that she was startled, and that a distressed expression came over her face.

"You knew of course—that he—that he—was frozen?"

"Yes, but not much more. I thought it strange that he should have been out, up the line, at that time?"

He saw her wince.

"Was there any sort of a reason?" he asked.

"I always felt it was my fault," she told him in a low voice. "I—I—was the last he spoke to."

"And was something said that—possibly—upset him?"

"Yes."

He turned and leaned towards her, so that he could look into her face.

"Was it anything to do with Montreal, little girl?"

"Y—yes,"—falteringly.

"Ah!"

There was a pause, then he asked: "Who told him?"

"It was that man we saw in the train. He was at the hotel in Kneller—and Lionel saw him there."

He was silent again. Then he drew his hand across his eyes. "It's such a little world, after all," he said.

Presently he went on: "How that unfortunate night has haunted you, Kathleen. *My* stupidity, and *my* mistake bringing you trouble on every side, when I would have given you nothing in all your life except joy. And in the end, I am asking of you still—quite unabashed, quite unsubdued, asking for all the best you have to give." He paused a moment, then added: "Once you asked something of me. Do you remember, Kathleen?"

A gleam of the old independent Kitt shone forth. "I am sure I never asked anything of you, at all."

"Yes, you did, you little independent Irish girl! You asked me to go away and leave you in peace."

His low laugh was enthralling. She felt his eyes

reading through into her soul. She thought he must almost hear her heart thumping.

"And do you remember what I said—that there would be no peace until I came into your life to stay? There wasn't, mavourneen. Peace began that day when I stepped into your sitting-room, and you didn't hear me. You were mine from that moment. I knew it, then, and I've known it ever since. I was only waiting until you knew it, too."

She was like a statue in the dim light. She had just that effect of carven beauty she had had the night they walked home through the snow in Canada, after the entertainment. Only then her eyes had been cold as the frozen snow, cold as chiselled marble. To-night they were like stars, or like deep pools reflecting star-light, full of soft, dreamy loveliness.

"What else am I to say to you? It seems idle to tell you that I love you." He paused; then he quoted, softly:

"There will no man do for your sake, I think,
What I would have done for the least word said.
I had wrung my life dry for your lips to drink,
Broken it up for your daily bread." . . .

"It's like that, Kathleen. I can't say any more, and I don't want to say any less. You've given me everything I ever had that seems best worth while. My life without you is only a poor thing; but such as it is, it is at your feet."

She seemed unable to speak; there was a mistiness in her eyes.

He leaned forward again, and his fingers closed over her hands as they lay in her lap. "Haven't you anything to say to me, acushla?"

Then a whimsical mood seized him. He rose from the seat and stood in the shadow of a tree close by. "You little Irish girl!" he said tenderly. "There is nothing I want you to say, but there is something I want you to do, more than I want anything else in heaven and earth—just to get up and come straight into my arms, of your own sweet will."

She sat rigidly still, staring across the water, fighting a last losing fight with herself to resist him, to resist her own heart.

"Is it so hard . . . you little independent Irish girl? Are you determined that I shall come instead to your feet?"

Then, with a long breath, the last resistance fled. She rose slowly and turned to him; and her face was beautiful beyond expression in its perfect surrender.

"My Queen!" he breathed, as he folded her in his arms.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FINIS.

IT seems hardly fair to leave my readers ignorant of how, in the end, poor Pat found compensation through the extreme condescension of Miss Forsyth-Hope. That enterprising young woman came on a visit to Lutterworth Manor in search of a matrimonial prize in the way of an earl or a duke. But after duly impressing her great importance upon the white-haired retainers, by sailing through the halls and *salons* like a young and modern Boadicea, and coming to the conclusion that Norman and Kitt were too absurdly sentimental to be endured, she was reluctantly driven to confess that a peer of the realm was not so easily captured as some might suppose. Then, in a moment of depression, Pat came upon the scene—poor Pat, with his amiable, idle, unresisting temperament.

And Miss Forsyth-Hope discovered that he owned land in Donegal that had been in his family for generations, and that the Mahons were descended from the kings of Ireland. That kings were common in Ireland, in those days, was of small moment to an enterprising young Canadian; and if the family property had dwindled to a few acres of bogland moor, who need know it across the water? Of course, it wasn't quite what she had meant to achieve, but it had its good points in many ways.

So she one day informed the astonished Pat that she guessed they might as well marry each other as not. And Pat was so tickled by the idea, besides being not a little overpowered at the mere thought of offering any

solid opposition, that he said he saw no particular reason against it, if he could be quite sure of getting back to Ireland for the fishing season.

And Norman and Kitt rocked with laughter over the pair of them at dinner that evening ; and made Miss Forsyth-Hope radiant with the promise that she should be married from Lutterworth Manor, with a goodly sprinkling of titles among the guests, and a full account in the *Court Circular*. "

"That's all right," said Chip. "I think 'Mrs. Forsyth-Mahon' will suit me well for a name."

"Except that they'll all call you 'Mrs. Pat' in Donegal," laughed Norman.

Which, to Chip's endless mortification, they all did.

THE END.

"I'D LIKE TO TAKE UP PELMANISM, BUT—"

SOME DOUBTS DISPELLED.

THE very prominence which Pelmanism has attained during recent years forms the basis of a doubt which exists in the minds of many people. A business girl said to me only the other day, "I'd like to take up Pelmanism, but it's so much advertised that I wonder whether there is not a certain amount of quackery about it."

The association of extensive advertising with quackery is a relic of long years ago, but it is strange how it persists. I was rather surprised, nevertheless, to hear this business woman express the doubt, for she is a marked success in her sphere of work, with a keen, analytical mind.

Inquiry revealed the fact that she had read only one or two of the Pelman announcements closely, though she had glanced in a half-interested way at scores of them. I then divulged that I was a Pelmanist, and immediately a regular machine-gun fire of questions was opened upon me. Was there anything in Pelmanism? Was it free from quackery?

IS THE CASE OVER-STATED?

Did not the advertisements overstate the case? Wasn't the most made of the successes attained by a few students, while the many secured no benefit worth speaking of? To all of which I replied by two further questions: Was it conceivable that over 400,000 people would voluntarily adopt Pelmanism unless they were convinced that they would gain in some way from the study? Would so many of the leaders of thought, including prominent educationists, influential business men, and well-known authors and editors, publicly state their unbounded faith and belief in Pelmanism if it were not capable of withstanding the most searching investigation?

TREBLED MY INCOME.

These broadsides took instant effect, and I followed up my advantage by mentioning some of the results Pelmanism had achieved in my own case: vast improvement in memory; keener perceptions; realisation of dormant possibilities; consciousness of greater power; appreciation of the beauties of poetry; easier concentration. I reserved for my final shots the two most practical outcomes of my Pelmanistic studies.

The first of these had a telling effect, for this would-be Pelmanist was full of ambitious plans in business. I told her that during the past two years my earnings had more than trebled, in spite of many difficulties and set-backs, and that to Pelmanism was due the major part of the credit for this financial improvement. The other result was the consummation of an ambitious plan which I had often contemplated, but which, until I had become a Pelmanist, I honestly believed to be something unattainable.

This conversation suggested to me that others are probably deterred from taking up Pelmanism by a variety of "buts," each of which could be disposed of in a minute or two if only it were possible to meet the doubters face to face.

For instance, at various times friends of mine have said: "But I'm not enough of a student to tackle Pelmanism. I could never sit and pore over books and lessons, even if I could find the time." Here we have a dual objection: (1) Pelmanism is thought to be hard to study, and (2) no time can be found for it. Let us deal with the second part of this objection first.

The Pelman Course requires from thirty to sixty minutes daily for a period of about three or four

"I'D LIKE TO TAKE UP PELMANISM, BUT—"

months. Many of the exercises can be practised at odd moments—when walking through the streets, while waiting in a friend's office or home, during train or 'bus rides, and so on. Other parts of the study can be done at home or at the office without seriously encroaching on one's time for other matters. The main fact to be borne in mind is that all of us can find or make time to do those things which really interest us. And Pelmanism is one of those things. Which brings me to the first part of the objection we are rebutting. Pelmanism is as unlike ordinary formal studies as anything can well be.

The very first lesson reveals the fascination of Pelmanism, and this fascination becomes intensified with each succeeding "little grey book." Of course, you cannot get the most out of Pelmanism unless you are prepared to follow the training closely. But any Pelmanist will tell you that there is no difficulty in doing this. Pelmanism itself provides whatever incentive may be needed by those who by nature are disinclined to apply themselves to study. Thus we can dismiss the plea of personal inaptitude for study.

BRAIN POWER.

A frequent contention of the anti-Pelmanists (for there are people who, without knowing what Pelmanism is, are opposed to it) is that it is impossible to make brains grow where none exist. By which they apparently mean that Pelmanism will not make wise men of dullards. Let me say that, so far as I know, the Pelman Institute has never claimed to be able to perform miracles, though tens of thousands of its members would unhesitatingly declare it has done so in their cases. An ordinary school education is the only foundation necessary to enable any man or woman to become a successful Pelmanist.

In fact, it might be said with a great deal of truth that Pelmanism

can be of far more benefit to those of comparatively few scholastic attainments than to those who have been endowed with a more liberal education. To be deterred from taking up Pelmanism because it is thought that only "brainy" people can make profitable use of it is to allow oneself to be influenced by an inaccurate or incomplete idea of what Pelmanism is and does.

PELMANISM FOR INDUSTRIAL WORKERS.

A Pelman-trained mind will show the industrial worker, for instance, in which direction advancement lies, and what steps to take to attain the goal toward which he is striving. Thousands of letters from Pelmanists have been published at various times, demonstrating in unmistakable manner the great benefit which anyone can derive from the course. A coal-miner declares Pelmanism to be very useful to him in his work; a munition worker gives Pelmanism direct credit for his ability to design a patent file; a Manchester bleacher says he never spent money to better advantage than on the Course. These instances could be multiplied almost indefinitely. The man or woman who hesitates to adopt Pelmanism through a mistaken notion that it is useful only to the business and professional classes is neglecting the supreme opportunity of his or her life.

Full particulars of the Pelman Course are given in "Mind and Memory" which also contains a complete descriptive Synopsis of the 12 lessons. A copy of this interesting booklet, together with a full reprint of "Truth's" famous Report on the work of the Pelman Institute, and particulars showing how you can secure the complete course at a reduced fee, may be obtained gratis and post free by any reader who applies (by postcard) to The Pelman Institute, H. Pelman House, Bloomsbury Street, London. W.C.1.



